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Faith in Action for Social Justice



PEACE BE UPON THEM

Christians and Muslims in the post-9/11 world.

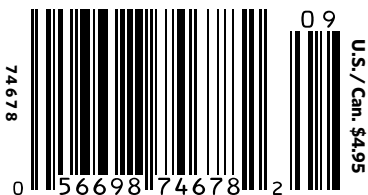
Plus:

GOP Rep. Walter Jones: "I was wrong about the war"

Is social justice on the seminary curriculum?

Four-color faith: Christians and comics

Above, a Methodist church in Tennessee hosts a Muslim Ramadan service.



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LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS is usually easier in the abstract. The members of Heartsong Church, just outside of Memphis, Tennessee, made that love very real last year in a concrete act of welcome. An Islamic faith community was moving in nearby, and their new center wasn't going to be ready in time for Ramadan. So the members of Heartsong, in a simple act of Christian hospitality, invited their neighbors to use the church building during the Muslim holy month.

Unfortunately, such loving actions between Christians and Muslims seem to be the exception these days. In nearby Rutherford County, just southeast of Nashville, residents—most of them Christian—blocked a mosque planned by the Islamic community. “Why do they hate us?” a child asked the local imam, Ossama Bahloul, according to a reporter. “I said it’s just a misunderstanding, miscommunication,” Bahloul said. “I told him to love the



people because one day they can love you, too.”

When we asked Bob Smietana, an award-winning religion writer for *The Tennessean*, to visit Heartsong Church this summer and write about their interfaith bridge-building, Smietana responded, “A happy Muslim-Christian story? I’m in.”

The ripples from Heartsong’s outreach have been felt around the world. A group of Muslims in a small town in Kashmir, the disputed region near the border of India and Pakistan with much Muslim-Christian tension, saw a report on CNN

about the actions of the Tennessee church. Heartsong’s pastor, Steve Stone, told *Sojourners* that one of the Muslim leaders said, after watching the CNN segment, “God just spoke to us through this man.” Another said, “How can we kill these people?” A third man, according to Stone, went straight to the local Christian church and cleaned it, inside and out. The Muslims in Kashmir, following Heartsong’s neighborly example, told Stone, “We are now trying to be good neighbors, too. Tell your congregation we do not hate them, we love them, and for the rest of our lives we are going to take care of that little church.”

The events of 9/11 and the decade since have been a vivid and painful illustration of the consequences of vengeance and retribution. A small group of believers in Tennessee has offered a much-needed example of what can happen instead when we reach out in love to our neighbors, nearby and around the world. ■

Letters

BOUGHT GOVERNMENT?

Re: Elizabeth Palmberg’s “The Safety Net Frays” (July 2011): I don’t believe that we, as citizens, have any voice in these issues any more. According to an article published last October, “more than half of the [Senate’s] membership, 54 lawmakers, reported a minimum net worth of more than \$1 million.” I don’t think a millionaire has any inkling of what happens on Main Street and those who live on it. With the Supreme Court decision allowing corporations to contribute to political parties without limit, it became apparent that they are setting the agenda. Even though I have 45 years of paycheck stubs that said I paid into Medicare (and Social Security), that does not seem to matter. I am *entitled* to those benefits because I paid for them.

Russ Records
Las Cruces, New Mexico

OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE?

“The Safety Net Frays” is a nice piece, but we’ve seen this movie before. The American chattering classes chatter marvelously, but stopped believing in anything of value some

Ben Cohen’s Oreo budget analogy is clear and brilliant. Keep up the good work! —Susan Stanton, Gainesville, Florida

40 years ago. This constant repetition of the same moral-budget complaints, while LGBT rights claimants are left out of our circle of protection, is just one more sign of this.

Jennifer A. Nolan
Newton, Massachusetts

WAGING PEACE

Please continue to address the importance of promoting and building peace (“The Things that Make for Peace,” by Jim Wallis, July 2011), whether in Afghanistan, Palestine-Israel, Libya, or right here at home, rather than simply opposing our nation’s current wars.

American military violence, especially against innocent civilians (whether or not intentional) only breeds potential terrorism in the hearts of others. But I am troubled that some Afghans and many Libyans have asked us, and the NATO nations, to protect

them from further terrorism. Is it right to simply withdraw all military intervention? Is it not right for people of faith to at least respond, wherever possible, by *nonviolent* means? Might it also be important to promote international “armed service” organizations (as in an effective and responsive United Nations) that could, if necessary, respond to such concerns more justly and effectively than the U.S.?

Or is it best for people of faith to simply promote Jesus’ own way of nonviolence, at home and abroad, and withdraw our support from all forms of violence by any government, for any reason? **Grant Bakewell, Jr.**

Sacramento, California

Letters, Sojourners, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010 or letters@sojo.net. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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Keynote

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BY JIM WALLIS

9/11: What Have We Learned?



TEN YEARS AGO, terrorists hijacked four airplanes over the United States. Two were flown into the World Trade Center in New York City, a third into the Pentagon, and the fourth was crashed into a field in rural Pennsylvania. By the latest count, 2,996 people died, including the 19 hijackers and 2,977 victims.

A few weeks after that tragedy, more than 4,000 religious leaders of all faiths signed a statement that was printed as an ad in *The New York Times*. We spoke of the moral response to terrorism: “We must not allow this terror to drive us away from being the people God has called us to be,” the statement said. “We assert the vision of community, tolerance, compassion, justice, and

quickly dispersed, and the Taliban removed from power. Osama bin Laden was, of course, killed this spring, not by the war of occupation but with rigorous intelligence and special forces. Yet more than 100,000 U.S. troops continue to occupy the country.

Eighteen months after the 9/11 attacks, the twin menaces of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction were cynically used to justify the invasion of Iraq. And far from the quick and easy victory that U.S. officials confidently predicted, the war resulted in almost a decade of violence and death. Eight years later, 50,000 U.S. troops remain, and many are still dying—this June saw the highest monthly casualties in two years. In this issue, we feature a remarkable interview with Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC), who has become one of the strongest congressional opponents of both wars, principally because of his faith.

In 10 years of war, more than twice as many Americans have been killed as were in the 9/11 attacks—the total is now more than 6,100. By the time it’s all paid for, the two wars will have cost us an estimated \$4.4 trillion, and resulted in hundreds of thousands of Iraqi and Afghan civilian casualties. Neither war has made us safer or more secure. In fact, if anything, they have made us less so by fanning terrorist flames of resentment against the United States. *Sojourners* will continue to argue that war is not the answer. But our commitment is not only to reject or protest war, but to also find better ways to solve the problems that war purports to address. We must demonstrate how nonviolence can actually solve the problems that war claims to and doesn’t. And that will be the biggest test of our imagination.

Second, despite the efforts of

Presidents Bush and Obama to distinguish Islam from terrorism, Islamophobia in the United States appears to be rising. Incidents of Quran burnings, communities attempting to ban mosques, prohibitions of Muslim women from wearing traditional covering, ballot initiatives targeting “sharia” (Islamic law), workplace discrimination, and hate crimes are all frequently occurring.

This rise of intolerance toward Muslims in our national political discourse increases the importance of elevating voices committed to peace and interfaith understanding. We must continue to assert the American dream of pluralism and religious freedom. America should be a safe place for people of all faiths. We can increase U.S. Christians’ understanding of Islam and counter stereotypes about Muslims by lifting up positive stories of interfaith cooperation, and by getting to know members of other faiths in our communities.

The media prefer conflict to stories of positive engagement and shared service between our diverse faith traditions. Many Christians, Jews, and Muslims—especially younger believers—have more interest in one another than they have fear, and many share a commitment that their faith must make a difference in the world. In some ways we are doing better since 9/11 than before; many churches know more about their Muslim neighbors, and their faith, and are learning to work together to make their communities better. The amazing and encouraging story of Heartsong Church in this issue is one such story. Our commitment at *Sojourners* is to tell those stories and encourage those partnerships. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners.

America should be a safe place for people of all faiths.

the sacredness of human life, which lies at the heart of all our religious traditions. America must be a safe place for all our citizens in all their diversity. It is especially important that our citizens who share national origins, ethnicity, or religion with whoever attacked us are, themselves, protected among us.”

On this 10th anniversary it is appropriate to ask what we have learned. How have we grown as a country? How have we healed, or how have we, in our hurt, turned around and hurt others? In two critical ways, we have shown that we did not learn the right lessons.

First, we have spent much of the past decade deeply engaged in two wars. Less than a month after the 9/11 attacks, President Bush began the bombing of Afghanistan, which was followed with U.S. troops. The stated objectives were to capture or kill al Qaeda and to overthrow the Taliban government. Al Qaeda was

Paul Sakuma/AP



'I Was in Prison ...'

Supporters rally in San Francisco on behalf of 500 prisoners at California's Pelican Bay State Prison who launched a hunger strike on July 1 to resist inhumane conditions. Over the Independence Day weekend, the protest swelled to nearly 6,600 inmates refusing rations in 13 prisons in California, Ohio, and elsewhere. Inmates at Pelican Bay's security housing unit, where they are held in solitary confinement more than 22 hours a day, organized the protest across traditional racial and gang divisions. "Our only option of ever trying to make some kind of positive change here is through this peaceful hunger strike," said inmate Todd Ashker.

By Gebe Martinez

ICE Follies

"Silent" raids that drive workers into the underground economy are worse than useless.

THERE ARE NO whirring helicopters, law enforcement vehicles, or hundreds of federal agents swooping down on businesses as in days of old. Instead, such immigration raids have been replaced by a less overtly brutal approach: "silent" raids, or audits of work eligibility I-9 forms.

But the fear remains.

At the first whisper of an employer receiving notice from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that employees' eligibility records are about to be checked, pulses rise. Legal workers worry about being erroneously bounced out of work; unauthorized employees fear being kicked out of the country and separated from their families. Communities are shaken, business operations are disrupted, and jobs are lost. The anemic economy takes another hit.

In June, ICE revealed that it had recently sent 1,000 companies in all 50 states notices of pending I-9 audits—and that, in the fiscal

year that started Oct. 1, the agency had racked up 2,338 audits, handily exceeding the total for the entire previous year.

The auditing process was stepped up by the Obama administration in an attempt to show that it could enforce immigration laws in a more effective yet compassionate manner than the preceding Bush administration,

in the underground, cash economy largely escape detection. Meanwhile, hard workers are punished, rather than the "worst of the worst" criminals that the law enforcers would rather be chasing.

Remarkably, the I-9 audits do nothing to diminish the undocumented workforce. Instead, the workers often get bounced out

The enforcement-only approach has become a bludgeon in the absence of comprehensive immigration reform.

whose high-profile raids focused on rounding up workers, not employers. "ICE may arrest workers we encounter, but arresting workers in and of itself is not a strategy or the goal of the program," ICE spokeswoman Gillian Christensen said.

But the current enforcement program misses its mark: Unscrupulous employers

of jobs where they contributed federal taxes, and add to the expansion of the underground economy, where low wages depress the pay for all U.S. workers.

Our standard economy suffers, and so do workers. In one Minnesota case, hundreds of Chipotle Mexican Grill employees were fired in the weeks before Christmas last year in the

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The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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wake of an ICE audit. One can only imagine the anguish of families during what should have been a season of celebration. The business' legal costs also are rising, adding to the cost of operations.

That is what happens when the politics of fear turns into real fear for employers and, even more important, for their workers. Lost in the debate over this contentious political issue is the moral imperative to be just and compassionate to our neighbors and fellow workers.

Somehow, the public's preference for pragmatic solutions to our broken immigration system, solutions that reflect our nation's values, needs to break through the political stagnation that pits one interest against the other so that no one wins.

The enforcement-only approach has become a bludgeon in the absence of

comprehensive immigration reform. To replace this system in which everyone loses, Congress must enact a comprehensive immigration reform law—one that includes not only enforcement, but also a revamped visa system that meets the needs of the labor force and allows families to remain together, and a tough but pragmatic program for legalizing the 11 million unauthorized immigrants in the country. With such reform, workers will not be unfairly punished, good employers will not be turned into immigration enforcement officers, and our economy will be able to grow for the benefit of all U.S. taxpayers. ■

Gebe Martinez is communications coordinator for the Immigrant Justice Campaign of the Service Employees International Union. She previously worked as a journalist covering politics and policy.

By Claire Lorentzen

Studying War More?

ROTC is back on campuses—but military thinking still conflicts with the life of the mind.

AFTER LAST DECEMBER'S repeal of “don’t ask, don’t tell” opened the doors for openly gay and lesbian people to serve in the military, a slew of elite universities, including Stanford, Harvard, Columbia, and Yale, invited the U.S. military’s Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) back on campus. The universities had banned ROTC during the Vietnam War. Their recent action will add to ROTC’s expansion over the last four years, during which it has increased its enrollment on college campuses by 27 percent. More than 56,000 students spread over nearly 500 colleges in the U.S. are currently in ROTC, many receiving full-tuition military scholarships in exchange for up to 10 years apiece of active military service.

Alok Vaid-Menon, president of Stanford Students for Queer Liberation, led protests against the return of ROTC, calling the military’s exclusion of transgender people a violation of Stanford’s nondiscrimination policy. But he was particularly “disturbed by the level of apathy” in the student body about the return of ROTC: “Most students didn’t really get involved,” Vaid-Menon told *Sojourners*.

There was little support for the

historical—and still relevant—concerns that prompted ROTC’s removal in the early 1970s: that the values of the military inherently contradict those of higher education. By handing space on their campuses back over to the military, these universities have failed to stand on the side of people of conscience who question and oppose militarism as the way to solve conflict.

At Stanford, the faculty senate voted 28 to 9 this April to bring ROTC back onto campus, more than 40 years after it stopped giving university credit for ROTC courses and started phasing the program off campus entirely. Its reasoning then, as a faculty committee stated in 1969, was that “ROTC departments are, by their nature, incompatible with the University’s primary commitment to the unrestricted creation and dissemination of knowledge.”

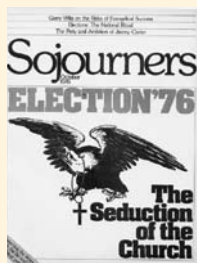
As David Harris, a student leader in the campus movement against the Vietnam War, told the *Stanford Daily* last year, “If you believe in the life of the mind, you don’t drop napalm on villages.” My mother, also a Stanford student during the Vietnam era, remembers it as a time when “people were fasting, conducting sit-ins, chanting, [and]

From the Archives

October 1976

The Powers That Be

I FEAR THAT the political truth about America is that since the time of the Second World War—since technology superseded industrialization as the dominant institutional and ideological power in society—the nation has been suffering a counterrevolution.



Its conspicuous feature has been the proliferation of extra-constitutional agencies and authorities which, in their political impact, have become the effectual regime of the nation, displacing the inherited governmental institutions, usurping the rule of law, and investing ruling authority beyond accountability to human beings.

I do not want to be indefinite about my meaning. I am referring to the extraordinary principalities which have flourished as this society has become a technocracy, like the CIA, the Pentagon, the FBI, and the whole cabal of secret police and security agencies, and, further, the so-called private principalities—the multinational corporations, the utilities, the conglomerates—which are politically associated with the military, intelligence, and police powers. I am talking about the famous military-industrial-scientific complex in its operation as an effectual second government outside the realm of the law or the reach of the Constitution, and as it has neutralized or captivated or obviated the lawful and publicly designated government. ■

William Stringfellow was an author, lawyer, and lay theologian when this article appeared.

marching” against the war. Students passionately upheld their conviction that universities should not support the military in any way. Instead, universities should serve society as peacemakers, approaching societal problems through thoughtful discussion, analysis, and debate—not through militaristic processes that treat violence and war as solutions to conflict.

Fundamentally, higher education institutions exist to foster an environment dedicated to asking questions, uniquely free from social, political, or economic ties and pressures. ROTC students and instructors are linked to another institution—the United States military. A conflict of interest is inevitable. As Sam Windley, president of Stanford Says No To War, wrote in a letter to the *Stanford Daily*, “You may think [the U.S. military] is the greatest employer on the face

of the earth or you may think it is repugnant, but ... the question at hand [is] whether Stanford University, as an institution, should treat the U.S. military any differently from the way it treats other employers.” If other employers are not allowed to build buildings on campus or teach classes for credit, why should the military receive special treatment?

In this shift in ROTC policy, Stanford and other institutions fail to uphold their integrity, of which free thinking is a defining characteristic. There may be ways that universities can better educate about war and militarism, but bringing ROTC back to campus shouldn’t be one of them. ■

Claire Lorentzen, online editorial assistant at Sojourners, is a 2010 graduate of Stanford University.

By Richard Kirsch

Irrational Discourse

Will we control high U.S. health-care costs, or just shift them to seniors?

AT PRESS TIME, it was not yet clear whether or how much the negotiations on the federal debt ceiling would hurt Medicare. But one thing is certain: Intense debate will continue about how to control Medicare costs, and it will include heated rhetoric about “rationing” health care. But where a normal definition of “rationing” would be “the

proposals in April, some form of which we may be debating until next year’s election and beyond, would extend that bleak picture to the 43 million Americans who rely on Medicare. Ryan’s plan would double out-of-pocket costs to seniors over the coming decade—while enriching private insurance companies. The House Republican budget

The problem is not with Medicare and Medicaid.

equitable distribution of scarce resources,” the health-care system in the United States is the polar opposite: It inequitably distributes abundant resources. And the people who raise the loudest accusations are actually promoting an increase in this unjust kind of rationing.

The U.S. spends twice as much as other developed countries on health care, while leaving 50 million people without any coverage, resulting in the premature death of 45,000 people a year. Tens of millions more people are sicker because they don’t get the care they need; many people suffer under crushing medical debt.

Rep. Paul Ryan’s Republican budget

plan also sought to ration care by capping federal spending on the 69 million seniors and family members who rely on Medicaid and by ending the 2010 health-care reform law’s expansion of health coverage to 32 million uninsured people.

While it is true that the rising cost of U.S. health care is one of the biggest long-term challenges to the federal budget, the problem is with our overall health-care system, not with Medicare and Medicaid. In fact, they pay less for services than private insurance does. For example, even with its older patient base, Medicare pays \$2,200 for an average hospital stay, almost 50 percent less than the U.S. average. It’s the most prominent

U.S. example of what can be seen throughout the world: National health insurance controls cost, because governments have the bargaining power to pay lower prices for services.

Paying lower prices would not result in fewer services or rationing care, as conservatives argue—in fact, just the opposite. Health care is much more expensive in the United States than in other developed countries, but we go to the doctor a lot less in the U.S. than they do in those countries; we also are admitted to the hospital less often and for shorter stays. Societies that pay lower prices can afford access to more care.

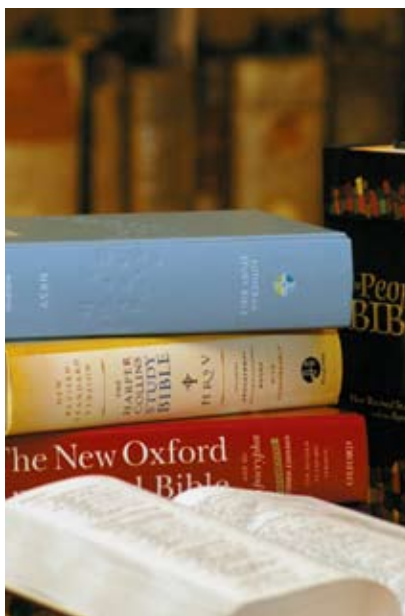
In April, President Obama contrasted his budget approach with that of the Republican budget, saying: “Their plan essentially lowers the government’s health-care bills by asking seniors and poor families to pay them instead. Our approach lowers the government’s health-care bills by reducing the cost of health care itself.”

Last year’s health-care reform established a new body, the Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB) to control costs. If the growth in Medicare costs exceeds a target amount, then the IPAB—now a subject of ire for Republicans and many Democrats—would institute cost control measures that would go into effect unless Congress intervened. Since cutting eligibility or benefits is not part of its mandate, savings would have to come from the actual drivers of cost: the prices paid for services and the way they are delivered.

The U.S. could also lower spending dramatically by having Medicare follow the example of the Veterans Administration: negotiating prescription drug prices and providing drugs directly to seniors, bypassing private insurance companies.

The battle over Medicare and how to control federal health-care spending is fundamentally about whether we will reverse or increase the current, incredibly inequitable system-wide rationing. It is a battle, fought on the terrain of public discourse, that will determine the health, livelihoods, and lives of millions of Americans. ■

Richard Kirsch is a senior fellow at the Roosevelt Institute, and a senior adviser to USAction. His book on the grassroots campaign that led to passage of health-care reform will be published in 2012.



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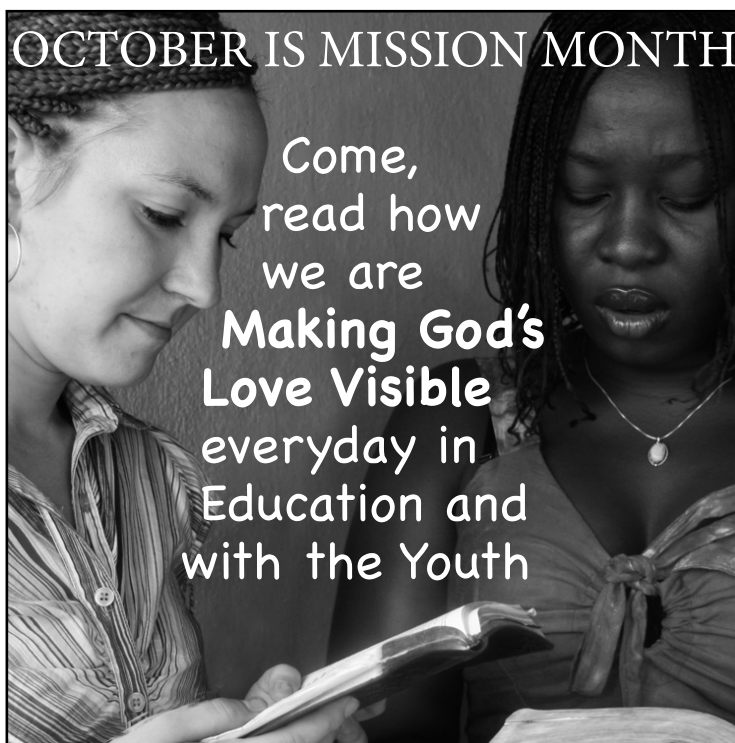
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Drawing a Line in the (Tar) Sand

THE USUAL STANDARD for writing magazine articles is to aim for the (relatively) timeless. In this case, you won't get another copy of *Sojourners* for two months, and, really, an article should stay fresh that whole time. Think plastic flowers, not fresh-picked daisies.

I'm violating that rule in spades with this column—if you didn't read it when the magazine arrived, then skip on to something else, because it will be wilted. But if you're a timely reader: We need you.

From August 20 to Labor Day weekend, some of us are mounting what may turn into the largest-scale use of civil disobedience yet around global warming. We'll be doing daily demonstrations that risk arrest at the White House in an effort to block the ugliest project you've probably never heard of, the so-called Keystone XL pipeline, which will run—if President Obama grants the necessary permits—from the tar sands of Alberta down to the Texas coast.

The original call for the action went out in late June, from a group



Aerial view of Syncrude's Aurora tar sands mine in western Canada.

Jiri Rezac/Greenpeace

could burn it all off you'd raise the atmosphere's carbon concentration from its current 390 parts per million to nearly 600. Even burning a much smaller amount of these tar sands would mean that it's "essentially game over" for the climate, according to Hansen.

The pipeline is ugly for other reasons too—it trashes native lands and endangers prime American farmland (can you imagine running an oil pipeline atop the Ogallala Aquifer?). But it's beautiful for one reason: President Obama, all by himself, can stop it. Since it crosses national borders, it requires the man himself to sign a piece of paper saying it's "in the national interest."

We're pretty sure he wants to stop it: After all, the day he secured the nomination for president, Obama said that "if we're willing to fight for it," generations from now we'll see this as "the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal." But the pressure on

him will be enormous. So, as he said at the very start of his presidency, even (or especially) his supporters will need to keep the pressure on him to do the difficult things. We have to show him, and everyone else, that there's strong support for a livable planet. As EPA administrator Lisa Jackson said in June to explain Obama's less-than-perfect environmental record: "They're not marching on Washington the way they did on Earth Day in the '70s." She's right—it's time for us to do what needs doing.

D.C. in August is not everyone's idea of a great vacation spot. It's hot and humid. But here's the thing—unless we get to work right now, it's going to be hot and humid everywhere. So join us at tarsandsaction.org (and if you read this column late, you can go there now to see the pictures of what you missed—and then visit 350.org to join the ongoing struggle for climate justice). ■



Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature*, is founder of 350.org.

This may be the largest civil disobedience yet around global warming.

of individuals that included Wendell Berry, Naomi Klein, Tom Goldtooth of the Indigenous Environmental Network, scientist Jim Hansen, and others. They stressed that the action will be entirely peaceful; in fact, if you want to come you've got to be "dignified in dress and demeanor." That's because we want very much to show who the radicals are in this story.

And make no mistake—that pipeline is a radical act. It helps unlock the planet's second-largest pool of carbon, outmatched only by the oil wells of Saudi Arabia. There's enough carbon up there that if you

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Poetry

BY RICHARD SCHIFFMAN



Mohamad Ramadan/Getty Images

Heaven's Back Door

Eschewing perfection, they knotted in a flaw,
the human signature and kink that made
the carpet whole—not less perfect, but more
for the fraying edge, the bleeding dyes
that cloak their treasure in disguise,
an act of indirection modeled from on high:
as when the Deity said *Be ...*
and out crawled—the twisted,
the crippled, the deformed.

Surely He was speaking metaphorically,
this fallen world a figure for some brighter,
truer Word; this knotted, knotty life
designed as time's poor foil
and fool, a school whose graduates
recoil beyond the mortal coil.
Or is the coil itself the thing
the Weaver meant
when He said *Be ...*?

The loops and tangles of our fate
no metaphors for straight, but how all lives
must spin and be unspun in arabesque,
curving first away, then back again
toward whence they came.
Error being the game perfection plays—
which, by seeming less, becomes the more.
Arriving at heaven's back door
by our flawless sense of indirection.

Richard Schiffman is a poet and writer who splits his time between New York City and New Mexico.

G92

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PEACE BE UPON THEM

A Tennessee church welcomes its Muslim neighbors.

REV. STEVE STONE was just trying to be a good neighbor.

Two years ago, the pastor of Heartsong Church in Cordova, Tennessee, on the outskirts of Memphis, learned that a local mosque had bought property right across the street from the church. So he decided some Southern hospitality was in order.

A few days later, a sign appeared in front of the church. "Heartsong Church welcomes Memphis Islamic Center to the neighborhood," it read.

That small act of kindness was the start of an unlikely friendship between the two congregations, one that made headlines around the world. Members of the mosque and church have shared meals together, worked at a homeless shelter, and become friends over the past two years. When Stone learned that his Muslim friends needed a place to pray for Ramadan because their building wasn't ready, he opened up the doors of the church and let them hold Ramadan prayers there.

Critics said that Stone was a heretic for allowing people of another faith to pray in his church building. He says he's just doing what Jesus taught him to do. "Jesus told us to love our neighbors," Stone told *Sojourners*. "These people are actually neighbors."

THE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN Heartsong and the Memphis Islamic Center comes at a time when Muslim-Christian relations have been testy. In



Nikki Boertman/Memphis Commercial-Appeal



Muslim worshippers
during Ramadan
services hosted at
Heartsong Church.



"Everything we've done we've done as a witness for Jesus."

—Heartsong minister Steve Stone

communities from New York to California, from Wisconsin to Tennessee, proposed mosques have run into angry, organized opposition.

When the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 200 miles east of Cordova, put a sign on their property announcing a new building, a vandal spray-painted the words "not welcome" on it. Neighbors filed suit against the mosque—arguing that Islam is not a religion and that the mosque was a terrorist training compound in disguise. When construction started at the site, a vandal set fire to a backhoe and other equipment there.

In New York City, opponents of a mosque in Manhattan took to the street, proclaiming that the so-called "Ground Zero mosque" would be a symbol of victory for terrorists. Earlier this year, Tennessee state politicians introduced a bill that claimed that practicing Islam was a sign of treason. The bill was later amended to remove all references to religion.

In Cordova, things have been peaceful.

There have been no marches against the mosque or other public opposition. Aside from some angry emails, the two congregations have gotten mostly positive feedback about their relationship. They've

been featured on local and national news. A film crew from Bahrain came to town to film a story on the congregations. Recently, a local diversity organization awarded them their "Humanitarian of the Year" award.

The attention has taken Heartsong Church members—known as "partners"—by surprise. "I am blown away by how big of a deal it is," said Darren Eade, who has been part of the congregation for three years. Eade's background is pretty typical for the congregation. He's 32 and was an atheist until converting to Christianity three years ago. Many other church members grew up going to church but had become disenchanted with traditional religion before joining Heartsong.

On the Sunday before Memorial Day this year, Eade and a group of other congregants gathered in an upstairs room for an interview. The group members, most of whom were in shorts and flip-flops or sneakers, came from all walks of life: In the room were a marketing executive, an executive from Memphis-based FedEx, a blues musician, and a fitness instructor. All were drawn to Heartsong for its "come as you are" approach to religion.

Lee Raines, a blues musician, said he felt welcome in the church from day one. "Everyone accepts you," he said. "They don't hold any judgments against you." Beth Ewing, a director at FedEx, recounted how members of the church and mosque became friends.

It started with the sign. Mosque leaders had hoped their new building would fly under the radar and not get the kind of attention that mosques in other parts of the country have gotten. They wanted to mind their own business and worship in peace and quiet. But once they saw the sign, leaders from the mosque called Stone and asked if they could meet. That first meeting led to others. Leaders of the mosque invited church members to several programs, and gradually friendships developed between the two congregations.

DURING A MEETING in the summer of 2010, mosque leaders posed a question. Construction was going slowly at the Islamic Center, and they were concerned that the building would not be ready in time for Ramadan; would the church allow them to hold prayers in their building?

"We were hoping to use a classroom or one of the rooms for the children's program," said Dr. Bashar Shala, a cardiologist at the Memphis Heart Clinic and a member of the Islamic Center's board of trustees. Instead, church leaders offered the use of the main auditorium at the church—a multipurpose room that looks like a cross between a barn and big-box store. On Sundays, church members set up stacking chairs for the 600 or so people who worship there. The rest of the week the room is used for other activities, including an exercise class.

Like many contemporary churches, which feature rock bands and large video screens during services, Heartsong doesn't have a traditional view of the church's building. The Heartsong congregation started meeting 13 years ago in the gym of a local Catholic high school—and has retained that new church-plant identity, even though they've had their own space for about eight years.

On a recent Sunday, music in the church ranged from the contemporary Christian song "How Great is Our God" to "Get Together," the 1960s anthem by the Youngbloods: "Come on people now, smile on your brother / everybody get together, try to love one another right now."

"This building is not who we are," said Beth Ewing. "The building is not the church. The church is the people sitting in the room. When we are there for worship—it is holy ground."

When church is over, the worship space becomes just another multi-purpose room. So church leaders were glad to offer it to the Islamic Center for their evening Ramadan prayers. The offer took members of the mosque by surprise. Some felt uncomfortable using the worship space. "They feared we would be overstepping our welcome," said Shala. During Ramadan, members of the church served as greeters for the evening services so that their Muslim neighbors would feel welcome.

Ewing said that opening the building up for Ramadan was the Christian thing to

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PROSPECT
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Ramadan services at Heartsong Church.

do. “For them to use our building is a natural extension of being good neighbors,” she said. “They needed a place because their place wasn’t done. They asked for a day or two and it ended up being the whole of Ramadan.”

NOT EVERYONE AT Heartsong agreed with the decision.

Lee Raines was dead set against it. The musician admits that he had a negative opinion of Muslims at first. He thought of Islam as a “religion of hate” that had no place in

of Islam. They know more about the faith of their Muslim friends, who are doctors and lawyers and other professionals trying to provide for their families and make Memphis their home. Heartsong members such as Duane Ewing no longer associate Islam in general with terrorism. “I don’t fear my Muslim neighbors,” he said. “I don’t fear my Jewish neighbors. I don’t fear my Christian neighbors. I fear the crazy radicals.”

Nick Guerra, a youth leader at Heartsong, said that he’d learned there had been two bid-

emblazoned on it. “We are very clear that we are Christians. But we are trying to do something together for the good of the community.”

That’s a point Stone made after the service: The church’s friendship with the mosque is part of following Jesus. “Everything we’ve done we’ve done as a witness for Jesus,” he said. “God will take care of the rest.”

IN SOME WAYS, Stone’s job is easier than it might be for other pastors. At his congregation, which is affiliated with the United Methodist Church, he acts as the CEO of the congregation. Church members trust him to do the right thing. “We did not take a congregational vote,” he said.

For years, he’s been preaching to the congregation about reaching out to their neighbors. They’ve built the congregation by intentionally reaching out to people who don’t go to church.

Heartsong’s friendship with the Islamic Center has gotten mixed reviews from Stone’s pastor friends. Some have told him he’s making a mistake. Others say he’s doing the right thing—but say that their churches would never go along with it. That doesn’t sit well with Stone.

“We are in the ‘do the right thing’ business,” he said. “If you can’t do the right thing, you are in the wrong church.” ■

Critics said that Stone was a heretic for allowing people of another faith to pray in his church building.

the church. He wanted nothing to do with Muslims or their prayers. “I thought, ‘this is just wrong,’” he said.

He brought his concerns to Stone and other church leaders. What changed his mind was reading the story of the Good Samaritan in the gospel of Matthew. “Love your neighbor,” he said. “That’s it.”

Raines changed his mind, but about 20 church members didn’t. They left once the Ramadan prayers started. Among them were several close friends of Beth Ewing and her husband, Duane. Duane said he was disappointed to see his friends leave the church—and sad for them as well. “They’ve missed so much,” he said.

Having close ties to the mosque has allowed church members to make friends with Muslims and to deal with their fear

ders for the property across the street from the church, but “there was an overwhelming feeling that we’d rather have a mosque.” Guerra said that his faith in Jesus made it possible for him to befriend his neighbors. “We serve a God who is greater than any fear I could have,” he said.

Some critics of Heartsong say the church is blending Islam and Christianity. That’s not the case, said Stone. During the Sunday service on Memorial Day weekend, Stone talked about the church’s friendship with the Islamic Center. The two groups are making plans for a new park that would sit on both congregations’ property. Heartsong will donate three to four acres to the project, as will the Islamic Center. “They are very clear that they are Muslims,” said Stone, dressed in jeans and a T-shirt with the church name

Bob Smietana, religion writer for The Tennessean and a correspondent for Religion News Service, is co-author of *Good Intentions: Nine Hot-Button Issues Viewed through the Eyes of Faith*.

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ACROSS THE GREAT DIVIDE

Christians and Muslims in the post-9/11 world.

I CAN REMEMBER it like yesterday. It was three weeks before my wedding day—Sept. 10, 2001. The next morning my brother woke me up just before the first tower crumbled.

Since 9/11, I've traveled the world many times over. Some have called me a "freelance missionary," since in any given year I can end up visiting just about any country on the planet. Out of all the places that I've been and all the people I've met along the way, one experience stands out that continues to shape my attitude toward how Christians should (and shouldn't) engage Muslims today.

It was shortly after I moved back to the U.S. from Senegal. A filmmaker named Stephen Marshall was looking for a zealous Christian missionary to participate in a feature-length documentary film about the role that religion plays in the post-9/11 clash between Christianity and Islam. I was the zealous Christian missionary.

Marshall came to my home, interviewed me along with my family, and asked us about how our faith affects our views on capitalism, democracy, Iraq, Afghanistan, the so-called war on terror, and everything else under the sun. A few weeks after the interview, I accompanied Marshall to Pakistan to demonstrate to him the plight of Christian minorities living in predominately Muslim countries. I was glad I got that point across. I thought my work was done.

Then Marshall told me about Khalid.

Khalid is an Irishman who converted to Islam in a Saudi Arabian prison. Khalid

believes that democracy is human-made law, and that the hope of the world lies in Islamic sharia law. He also believes that 9/11 was "defensive jihad," a just retribution for the presence of U.S. troops in Muslim lands, U.S. support of Israel, the sanctions in Iraq that (according to UNICEF) killed 500,000 children, and U.S. support for dictators throughout the Muslim world.

When Marshall asked me if I wanted to travel to London and go head-to-head with Khalid on camera, I refused. But then the strangest thing happened. A few months later I was in Brazil. After I preached in a Pentecostal church, a man came up to me and told me that I'd go to London before the end of the year, and that I would have a great victory. I took that as a sign.

The meeting didn't go as I expected. Khalid was hot-tempered and ready for a fight. I was trying to be gentle and Christ-like. Not an even match. It took me all of about two minutes to realize that there wasn't going to be the Dr. Phil moment where Khalid discovers his inner child that wants to be loved. I realized that if there was going to be a victory like the one prophesied, it would be a victory in reverse. I would be the one changed.

Many of Khalid's ideas sounded crazy to me. But I realized, based on my experience in Senegal, that he wasn't alone in his complaints against Western decadence and U.S. foreign policy. Senegal is one of the most peaceful, tolerant Muslim countries in the world, yet I often had conversations with people who wore



Muslim women pause at an icon of the Madonna and Child in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

When the New Testament and the Quran are understood in their original context, many of the doctrines are compatible.

bin Laden T-shirts. Even though they knew I was American, the attitude of some of them was, “Bin Laden’s my hero. By the way, are you thirsty? Let’s have tea together!” Meeting Khalid forced me to examine my worldview and to think hard about how some people in the Muslim world view U.S. foreign policy and Christians who support that policy with their votes and their military service.

What does it mean for Christians to build bridges with Muslims? It doesn’t mean that we compromise the essentials of our faith. Often people think that the work of “building bridges” leads to either compromise or the glossing over of religious differences. This

is why words such as “dialogue” and “bridge-building” can be taboo in evangelical circles, because the stereotypes are sometimes true. But there are some people changing that. People like Rodney Cardoza.

Rodney Cardoza is the founder of Abrahamic Alliance International, an organization that builds peace by uniting Jews, Christians, and Muslims to serve the poor and marginalized. While most attempts at dialogue and bridge-building tend to gloss over the theological differences between Christians and Muslims, Cardoza tackles them head-on and dares to suggest that many of these differences can actually be reconciled by a careful reading of the Bible and the Quran. Cardoza’s work is helping Muslims rethink their assumptions about the testimony of the Bible. The fact is, Jesus is all over the Quran. The Quran affirms Jesus was sinless and born of a virgin, and that he healed the sick and raised the dead. In addition to referring to Jesus as the Word of God and the Messiah, the Quran calls Jesus the Spirit of God—hinting that Jesus manifests the presence of God, who is Spirit. The Quran even affirms Jesus is coming back to judge the living and the dead, something the apostles preached often in the book of Acts.

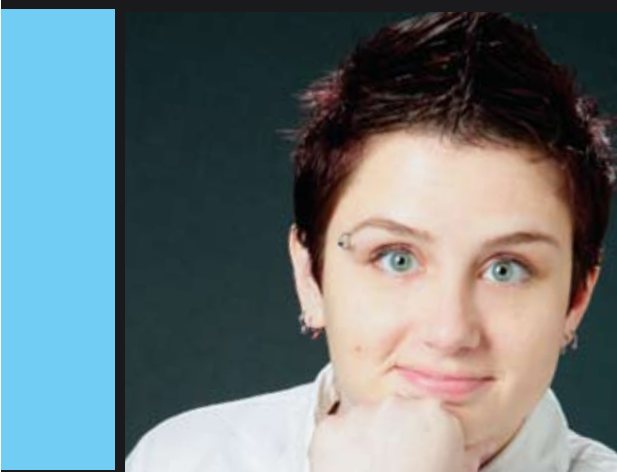
While it’s true that the vast majority of Muslims today deny Jesus was crucified, that hasn’t always been the case, and according to respected scholars the Quran is far from clear on this matter. In a publication titled “Did Jesus Die on the Cross?” Joseph Cumming, the director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture Reconciliation Program, a program that builds bridges between Christians and Muslims, wrote, “Throughout the centuries there has never been just one, single ‘correct’ Islamic answer to the question of whether Jesus died on the cross ... Among the varied answers which Muslims have given through the centuries, I believe that there is much more room to find common ground with Christians than is generally supposed by either Muslims or Christians today.”

For centuries theological differences about the crucifixion and about whether or not Jesus is the “Son of God” have seemed intractable, but a growing number of Christian scholars such as Cardoza and Cumming believe that interpreting the Quran through a biblical lens can result in surprising agreement.

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Mark Siljander is a former Republican member of Congress who started his career highly suspicious of Muslims and all things Islamic but has since written a book called *A Deadly Misunderstanding*, in

of our theological precepts; however, we will have to be willing to stretch our thinking from the religious and cultural boxes that we find ourselves incarcerated in. So it's not a theological compromise. We need

Meeting Khalid forced me to re-examine my notions of how the Muslim world views U.S. foreign policy.

which he chronicles his journey of peace-making and bridge-building with Muslim leaders around the world. When I asked Siljander about the dangers of slipping into the postmodern all-religions-are-equally-valid philosophy, he gave a surprising answer.

"Let me be so bold to say, without succumbing to postmodernism and the all-ways-lead-to-God type of thinking, that we (Christians and Muslims) actually agree and don't necessarily realize it initially," Siljander said. "I believe we don't have to give up any

to be liberated from our non-scriptural cultural understanding."

By helping Muslims see Jesus in their own book, Christians can help Muslims become better Muslims. And vice versa: Muslims can help Christians become better Christians by clarifying cultural and linguistic misunderstandings.

Christians should at least be open to the possibility that when the New Testament and the Quran are understood in their original context and languages, many of the doctrines are compatible. While it will never

be possible to reconcile the actual practice and interpretations of the vast majority of Christians and Muslims, acknowledging the possibility that the sacred texts themselves are reconcilable allows Christians to pursue both the peacemaking and disciple-making commands of Jesus.

Best of all, we can pursue these commands transparently, not under cover where representatives are one thing abroad and another thing back home (missionaries cloaked as humanitarian workers). Even if the sacred texts turn out to be irreconcilable, it's probably not a bad idea to show Muslim friends that so much in the Quran mirrors what we read in our Bible. Because at the end of the day, if Christians want to build bridges with Muslims, why not start with the person that both faiths love and admire: Jesus! ■

Aaron D. Taylor is the author of Alone with a Jihadist: A Biblical Response to Holy War (Foghorn Publishers, 2009).



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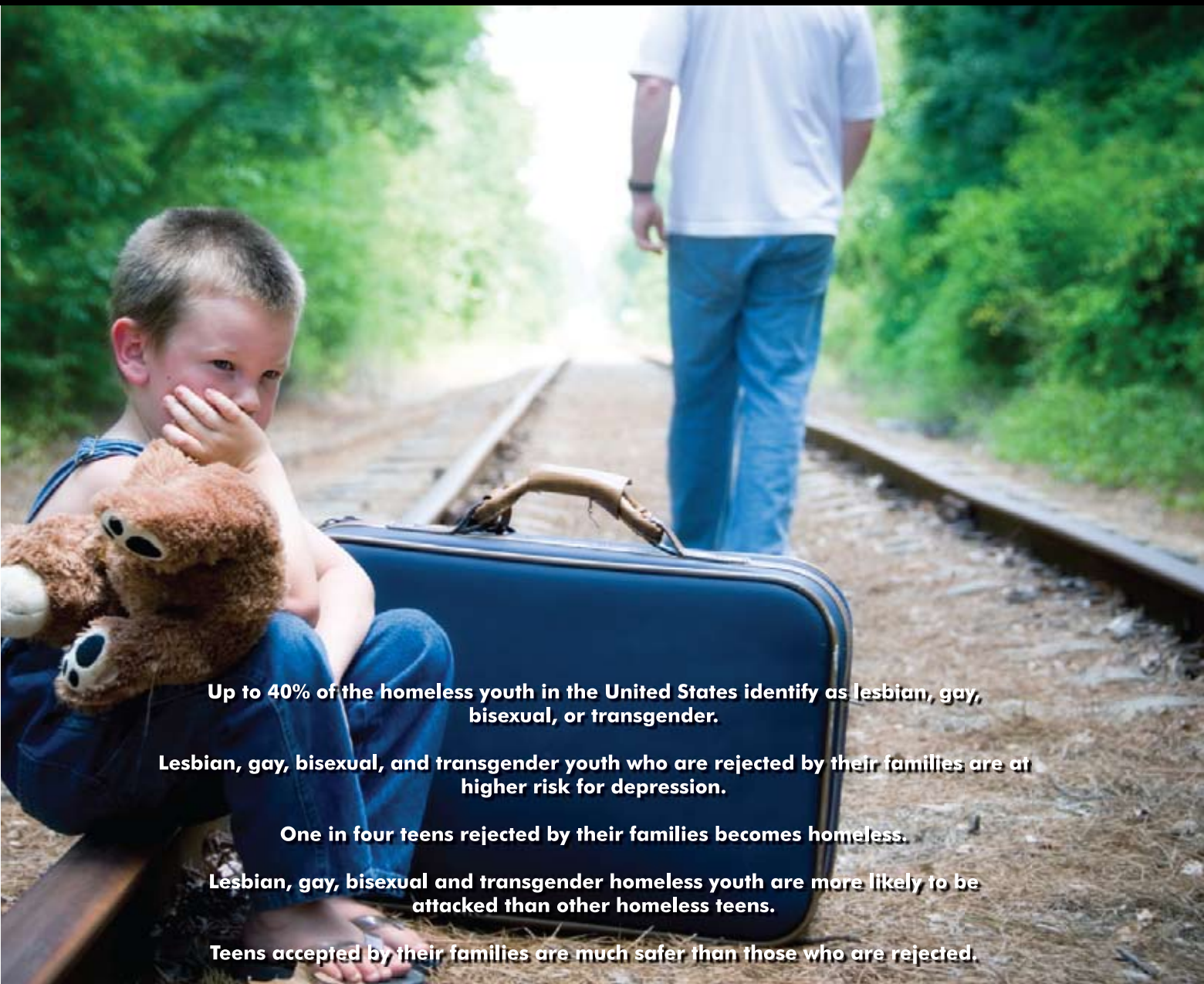
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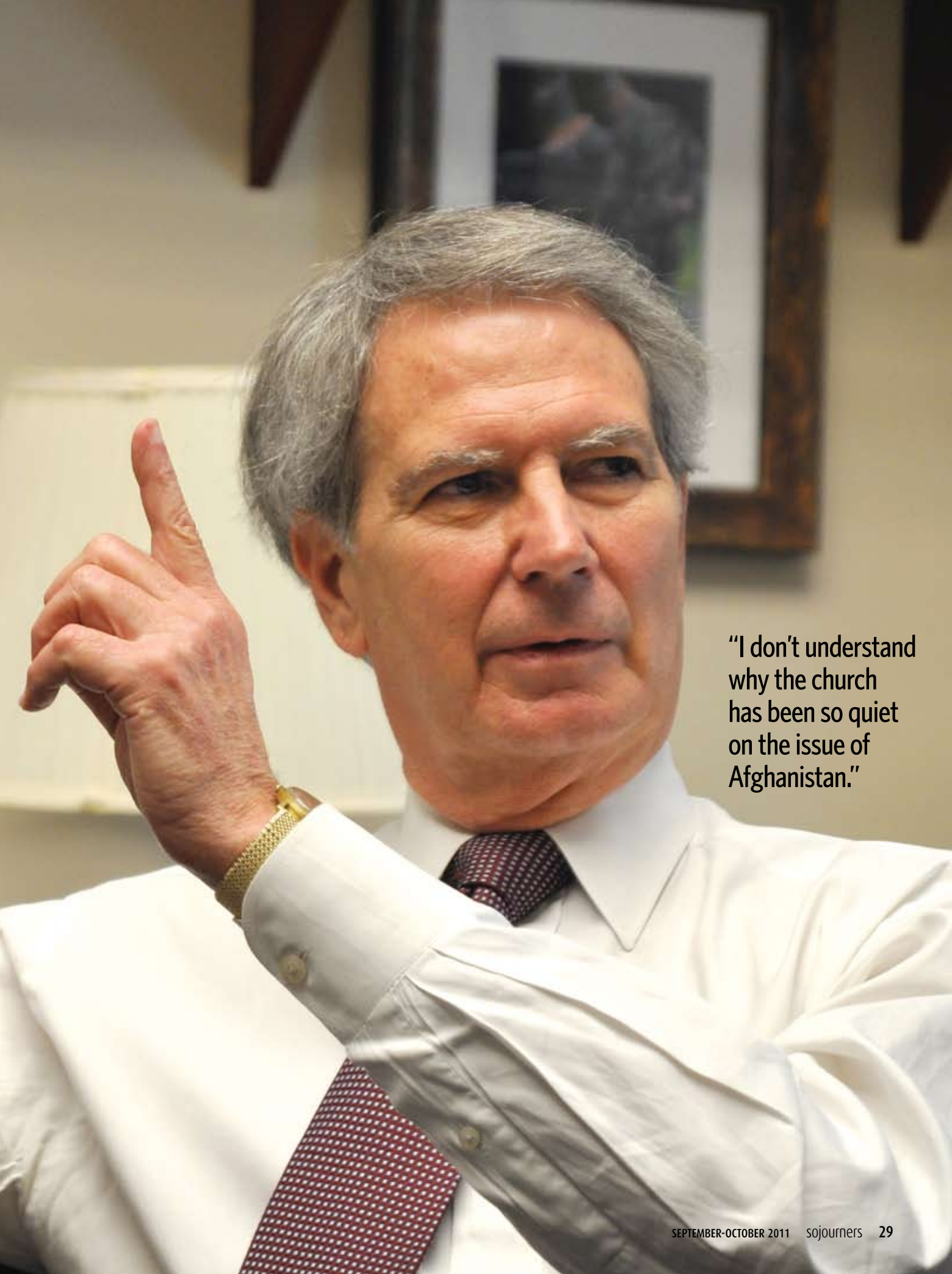
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A CONVERT TO PEACE

A conservative Republican member of Congress talks about his journey of repentance for supporting the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

REP. WALTER B. JONES sits in his office in Washington, D.C., surrounded by photos and memorabilia of fallen U.S. soldiers. Though he voted in 2002 to authorize U.S. war against Iraq, the conservative Republican from North Carolina soon came to believe that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan violated his Christian principles. Jones, who has become one of the wars' most outspoken critics, reached across the aisle to coauthor, with Rep. Jim McGovern (D-Mass.), the McGovern-Jones Amendment, introduced in July 2010, which calls for a clear timeline for the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. *Sojourners* editor-in-chief Jim Wallis talked with Jones this summer in his Capitol Hill office.

Photos by Heather Wilson



"I don't understand why the church has been so quiet on the issue of Afghanistan."



Service members unload the casket of a U.S. soldier at Dover Air Force base.

Tim Shaffer/Reuters

"If I'm a true pro-life member of Congress, then isn't that 18- or 19-year-old boy or girl who gave their life in Iraq or Afghanistan part of God's plan too?"

Jim Wallis: Rep. Jones, I admire your political and moral courage for speaking out against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Tell me about your journey from voting to go into Iraq in 2003 to where you are today.

Rep. Walter B. Jones: When I walked to the floor of the House the night that President Bush asked Congress to give him the authority to go into Iraq, I did not feel good about my vote. But because Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, and Gen. Richard Myers had been briefing both parties, I voted to go into Iraq.

God was being challenged in my

heart by my evil desire to get re-elected. I felt that the military retirees among my constituents—Camp Lejeune is in my district—would believe the misinformation [about the alleged need to go into Iraq], and I was not strong enough to vote my conscience.

About two weeks later, I got a call from Rep. Elton Gallegly from California. He said one of his constituents, Marine Sgt. Michael E. Bitz, was killed in Iraq, and that Bitz's wife, Janina, and family were still at Camp Lejeune. Michael Bitz's funeral was that Saturday. It was an outdoor service. The first thing I saw was a flag-draped coffin with a Marine at the head and foot of the coffin. At the funeral, they sat me down beside Janina. The Baptist minister got up and talked about Janina and Michael being strong in their faith. Janina got up and read the last letter Michael wrote the night before he was killed. In the letter he professed his love for Jesus Christ. He wrote, "I do not know what God has in store for me, but I know, either in heaven or on Earth, we will be together again."

God wanted me to take away from that funeral service the pain of a family that lost a loved one for going into a war that never had to have been fought. I realized my mistake and my weaknesses for not voting my conscience.

But we had already gone into Iraq. How did you start to act on your newfound convictions?

In 2003, I started writing letters to the families and extended families of people killed in the war. All told, we've written well over 10,000 letters to families and extended families now. This is my penance. God has given me absolution now, because I have shown God that I have asked forgiveness. I am still signing the letters, but I'm at peace with my mistake of trusting man more than God.

You are a conservative Republican. How did your party react when you came out against the war?

The year after I came out against the war, the Democrats won the majority. Duncan Lee Hunter, who had been chair of the Armed Services Committee, became ranking [minority] member. After we lost the majority, I should have been the ranking

member of the readiness subcommittee, but because of my position, Duncan came to me and said, "I cannot recommend you for ranking member because I know you will vote with the Democrats to get out of Iraq." But you know, I think I'm happier not being in that position, and I think God's happier with me, quite frankly.

You recently reintroduced the McGovern-Jones Amendment, calling for an accelerated timeline to remove troops from Afghanistan. How did it feel to get 204 votes, with 26 Republicans voting in favor of the amendment, up from 162 votes last year?

I was tickled, believe me.

Is there any progress in Afghanistan?

No, sir. President Obama and [then-Secretary of Defense] Robert Gates are talking about being in Afghanistan until 2014, or 2015. Well, today on the floor, I said, "Afghanistan: Get out."

In December, I read about an Army colonel who was quoted in *The New York Times* saying that the training of Afghans to be police officers and soldiers was going much better. Well, that's not true. There are 1,400 tribes in Afghanistan, and they don't want to be us. There's no way. They're Muslims; there's nothing wrong with Muslims, but they don't want to be Christian. I asked a general about the [colonel's] quote, and he wrote, "Continued belief that we can train the Afghan army to be effective in the time we have ... is nonsense. The vast majority cannot even read. They are people from the villages, hooked on drugs, illiterate, and undisciplined. The South Vietnamese soldiers were much better trained, and they could not stem the tide ... What do we say to the mother and father or the wife of the last Marine killed?"

The debate about war is usually about political sound bites, not human faces. How do we get people to focus on the human cost of war?

If half the American people could visit Walter Reed [Army Medical Center], we would've been out of Afghanistan five years ago. If I'm a true pro-life member of Congress, then isn't that 18- or 19-year-

old boy or girl who gave their life in Iraq or Afghanistan part of God's plan too? I've been to Walter Reed so many times, and I've seen 22- and 23-year-old men who will never be able to father a child; that part of their body is gone; I've seen soldiers and Marines under 24 who have no body parts below their waist. [The cost of] taking care of these young men and women is going to be astronomical.

How does your faith inform your work today?

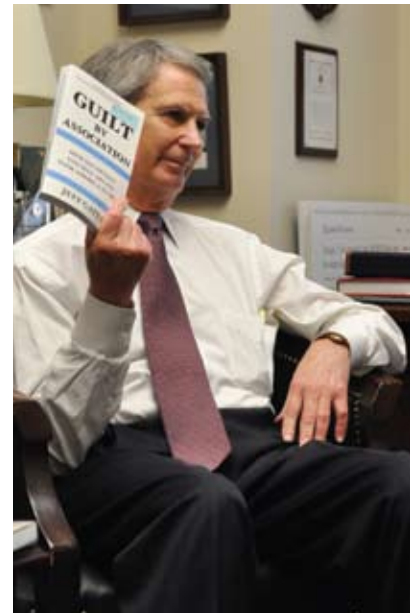
I cast my votes on my faith. I didn't say that in 2003 or 2004, but I think God guided me on this journey. I think God wanted to humble me, quite frankly, for not trusting him on that vote. God wanted me to come back to God because I didn't listen. I needed to understand that the world I live in is a world of arrogance and Christ was a man of humility, and in the world of arrogance you will accomplish nothing with arrogance. You have to be humble.

How can the faith community contribute to your efforts to end the war in Afghanistan?

The faith community needs to start speaking out. The church needs to be the leadership, and they're not. When the government is cutting programs for children and senior citizens, you ought to speak out about the corrupt government in Afghanistan, and ask, Why do we continue to allow Americans to die in Afghanistan while cutting funding for children and senior citizens? It doesn't make any sense. In all honesty, I don't understand why the church has been so quiet on the issue of Afghanistan.

What do you want to say to the American people about ending this war?

I want the American people to get engaged. Fewer than 1 percent are fighting this war. That means that 99 percent of the people not involved in this war won't get involved. I think the American people have to get engaged because Congress responds to the American people. But if they don't think the American people are watching or listening, they will keep going down the path they're going down right now. ■



"If half the American people could visit Walter Reed, we would've been out of Afghanistan five years ago."



SPECIAL FOCUS ON SEMINARIES

Seminaries offer theological education and prepare leaders for ministry.

But what do they teach their students about social justice?

We invited eight recent and not-so-recent graduates to reflect on how their seminary education impacts their work for social justice today.

TEACHABLE MOMENTS

Seminary graduates share what they learned about God's call to social justice.

THE NOISE *By Avedis Abovian*

ONE MORNING WHILE I was doing my clinical pastoral education, I was praying in the chapel at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. There was nobody else in that small room. The conditions were perfect to be alone with God. What else did I need at that beautiful moment to feel an important part of God's kingdom?

At that very moment my thoughts were interrupted by noises from the other side of chapel doors.

I stopped. I was amazed.

It was a revelation: "You cannot just know about people on the other side of your doors. Just listening to their cries and understanding their struggles can never be enough as long as they are on the

other side of your doors. This is not about 'big plans' that may bring positive changes. It is about connecting person to person; having them sit next to you at your dinner table; praying not just for them, but with them. This is about opening your doors and bringing everyone in and making them 'you'—turning yourself into 'them' and together becoming God's people."

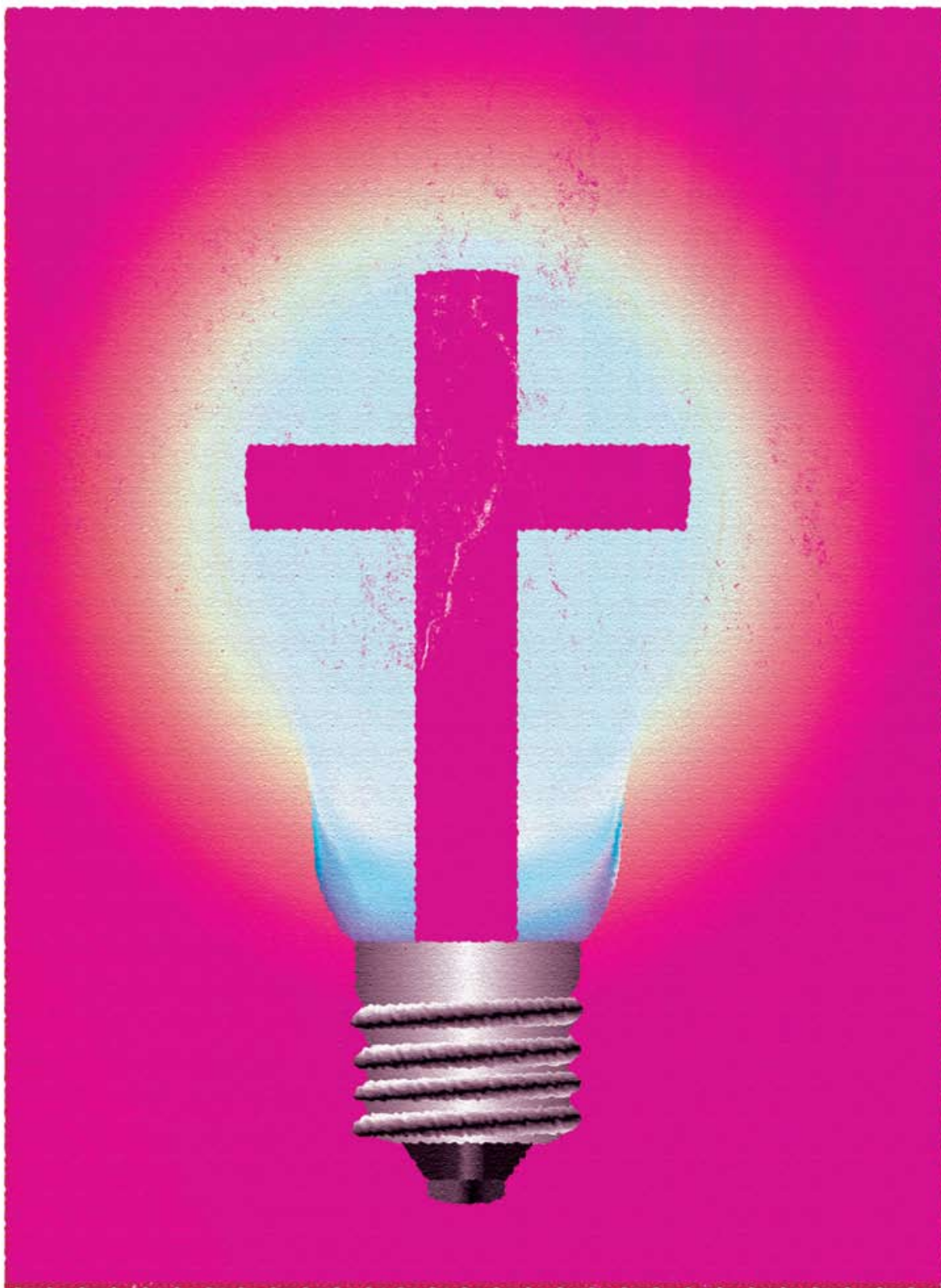
We are never alone with God. There is always the noise that should become our being, our prayer, and our connection with God. ■

"This is about opening doors and bringing everyone in."



Illustration by Ken Davis

Avedis Abovian is a priest and the youth director for the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America. He received his master's in divinity from Claremont School of Theology in 2008 and his bachelor's from Vazgenian Theological Seminary in Sevan, Armenia, in 1997. He lives in Burbank, California.



EVERYTHING IS NOT ESCHATOLOGICAL

By Nikia Smith Robert

EVERYTHING IS NOT eschatological: Everything is not otherworldly or heavenly bound.

This statement was my introduction to seminary, and I immediately perceived this assertion as an attack against the core beliefs I inherited as a product of the black evangelical church. How could a white male, whose privilege was embodied in his skin, identify with

There are some things that must be demanded now.

my forebears who found solace in the stanza “and before I’d be a slave, I’ll be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be free”? How could he tell me that this was not the same home to which my mother referred as she fought the social stigmas against a single parent and prayed for a home where “the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest”? This eschatological hope is what Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. relied on when the prevailing pressures of death seemed more imminent than life.

However, this white man’s antagonistic assertion allowed me to ascertain a new approach to understanding God: Everything



is not eschatological. There are some things that must be demanded now. Justice is now.

Where education is the leading factor to reduce recidivism rates, Pell grant eligibility for incarcerated persons needs to be restored today. With HIV being a leading cause of death among African Americans and where there is a newly infected person in the U.S. every nine and a half minutes, there is an urgent need for funding toward research and a cure. With warfare that results in millions dying and families torn apart, world peace needs to be established today. And after more than 40 years since King’s Poor People’s Campaign, the minimum wage needs to be a living wage today. Why? Because everything is not eschatological; the Kingdom of God is now, today, and our calling is to join with the Spirit in making it manifest here, from Harlem to Haiti. ■

Nikia Smith Robert graduated from Union Theological Seminary in 2009. She is an associate minister at First AME Church Bethel in Harlem and a senior associate at Ernst & Young LLP.



WHOLE-PERSON JUSTICE

By Joshua Daly

WHEN I FINISHED my undergrad time at Loyola New Orleans, I was intent on saving the world. My relentless dedication to “the cause”—through living in a Catholic Worker community and working with the Catholic Campaign for Human Development—would be enough to sanctify my soul and “this filthy, rotten system.” Or so I thought as a brazen, hopelessly idealistic 22-year-old.

As you might expect, I hit a brick wall or two or 10. Hard. This set the stage for one of the most important lessons I learned while in theology grad school: that I couldn’t avoid my own personal struggles by throwing myself into struggles for justice. If the world was to be saved by beauty, as Dorothy Day was fond of paraphrasing from Dostoevsky, then I had to discover and attend to the beauty and grace and healing God pours out right in the heart of a suffering world, in the heart of my own brokenness.

Self-care isn’t an add-on to “real” social justice work—especially not if that work is rooted in faith. Care for the whole person (“cura personalis” in Jesuit-speak), honoring others’ dignity and our own, is at the heart of following Jesus. ■

Joshua Daly is assistant director of university ministry at Loyola University in New Orleans. He received a master’s in theological ethics in 2008 from Saint Paul University in Ottawa, Ontario.

Honoring others’ dignity and our own is at the heart of following Jesus.

THE LEAST OF THESE By Melanie Weldon-Soiset



BEFORE MY MASTER of Divinity studies, I never would have associated children’s ministry and social justice. Though I enjoyed being a camp counselor in college, I did not perceive how playing with kids related to advocacy and hospitality.

This changed in my ethics class, examining the ethics of marriage and family. Never before had I considered why the church is called to invite children into service and worship. I had never pondered how many people, and lamentably many Christians, treat children at best as a fun distraction, and at worst as a liability or faction to exploit.

Jesus reminded the indignant religious leaders of his day that God ordains praise from the lips of children (Matthew 21:15-16). Children are not empty vessels—they have their own praise and calling to offer to God. When we stop seeing any group of people merely as helpless dependents, and instead recognize their God-given dignity, potential, and ability to bless us through relationship, then we are heeding God’s call to social justice. Seminary helped me see that call not only through working with immigrants and refugees (who are often the ones who care for children), but also in children’s ministry. ■

Melanie Weldon-Soiset is the director of Christian education at Western Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. She received her master’s in divinity from Wesley Theological Seminary in 2010.

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SPECIAL FOCUS ON SEMINARIES



THE CALL TO CARE

By Duke Kwon

ONE OF THE most important lessons that I (re-)discovered in seminary is fairly simple, even basic: God’s passion to create a whole new social order absolutely saturates the entire Bible.

I remember a class I took on the gospel of Luke. I can still picture my professor weeping on several occasions as we encountered Jesus’ compassion for the poor, powerless, and outcast. We saw it in our savior’s teaching; we saw it in those colorful portraits of his encounters with ordinary people—the blind beggar, the rich young ruler, Zacchaeus, nameless “nobodies” whom he touched and loved.

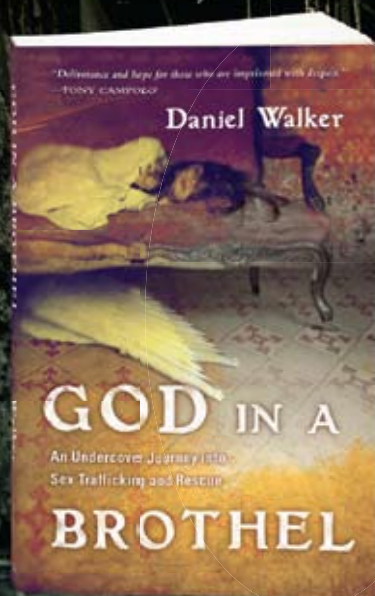
In that study of Luke, I was reminded that, quite simply, God really cares.

Social inequities, abuses of power, the misuse of wealth—these things matter to God. And so they matter to us, as we attempt to respond to the radical, and sometimes exhausting, call to build communities that seek justice and reconciliation. As a church planter, it changes everything to be reassured that this call arises from the Word, not our own good ideas or intentions. ■

The call arises from the Word, not our own good ideas or intentions.

Duke Kwon is the lead pastor of Grace Meridian Hill (www.GraceMeridianHill.org), a new congregation in the Columbia Heights neighborhood of Washington, D.C. He received master’s degrees in divinity (2003) and theology (2004) from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

DISPATCHES FROM THE GLOBAL JUSTICE UNDERGROUND



Undercover investigator Daniel Walker recounts how he infiltrated the multibillion-dollar global sex industry in order to liberate women and children from slavery. In vivid firsthand accounts, Walker traces his steps through a diffuse criminal underground stretching from Southeast Asia to Las Vegas, Nevada.

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SPECIAL FOCUS ON SEMINARIES

A HOLY INTERRUPTION

By Lisa Yebuah

I GREW UP in the church. I remember feeling so unsettled by the images that flashed across the television screen during the 1994 Rwandan genocide—but in no way did I connect that uneasiness with anything I was learning or doing in my own faith community. At best, my earliest formation in the church (and it was beautiful and deeply meaningful) compelled me to be a good Christian. However, I had not been taught what it is to be a co-laborer with the God who loves justice.



Then I went to seminary. Duke offered the gift of a “holy interruption” in my thinking. For the first time in my life, someone was actually asking me, “How will you be Christ’s hands and feet in the world?” I learned to think differently about my partnership with the incarnate God who stepped into the sloppiness and messiness and even into the genocides of this world. Duke had me convinced that faith in Christ could not be lived like one who stands behind a large glass window, fingers pressed against it, watching the world go by on the other side. Resurrection changes our job description to stand on the other side, pressing into the world’s hurts with the God who redeems them. Thanks be to God for holy interruptions! ■

Lisa Yebuah serves as the pastor of Inviting Ministries at Edenton Street United Methodist Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. She earned her master’s in divinity from Duke Divinity School in 2004.



LIBERATION FOR ALL

By Kathryn Anderson

I USED TO have a rich people problem: I couldn’t stand them. At the Catholic Worker house where I volunteered in college, a fellow volunteer and I would make fun of rich white people and their misplaced priorities. (Eyes rolling: Look at them buying salad spinners because heaven forbid their lettuce be wet!) They embarrassed us with their misdirected attempts at charity and failure to understand equality and social change. I was angry at Whole Foods, which I regarded as a vehicle for rich white people to assuage their guilt: “Oh sure, you people can afford cage-free eggs and grass-fed, organic beef! Do you even understand what it’s like to be poor?” my internal monologue railed. I felt my heart hardening. I felt my love pulling away from all people and directing itself to only some people. And I felt my love for those, my love for Lady Poverty, to be hollow.

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SPECIAL FOCUS ON SEMINARIES

When, later, I returned to school to study pastoral ministry, we read Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire begins by asserting that both the oppressed and the oppressors have a role to play in the work for liberation. The guests at the Catholic Worker, the suburbanites who spent one Sunday a month volunteering in the soup line, the suits downtown who didn't know we existed, and the middle-class college students who spent a summer there—all needed community, justice, liberation, and salvation.

From time spent with Freire, I began to see my ministry as giving everyone a chance at liberation by offering all the chance to participate in transforming our unjust society. All of us—rich and poor alike—are to be believed in. All of us have a tremendous responsibility and a tremendous ability. And all of us—rich and poor alike—are to be loved. ■

Kathryn Anderson earned a master's in pastoral ministry from Boston College's Institute for Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry in 2008; she currently serves as director of social justice ministry at Centro Altagracia de Fe y Justicia in New York City.

PRIMARY LOVE

By Naomi Brown

IN MY SECOND year of seminary, I traveled with a poverty organization to Mississippi and Tennessee to study poverty. In Mississippi, blacks and whites worshipped in separate churches and were buried in different cemeteries. It was 2008: Where was the love? Some seminarians simply observed; those who walked in the love of Christ sought a remedy. We wanted to address it, not to discuss it.

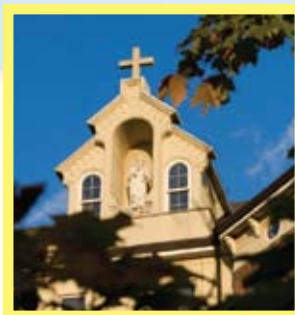
Rhetoric is futile; love is true fruit from the vine. ■

Naomi Brown, after working for the U.S. Department of Justice for 25 years, attended Union Theological Seminary, graduated in 2009, and is pursuing ordination while in ministry at New Greater Bethel Ministries in Queens, New York.



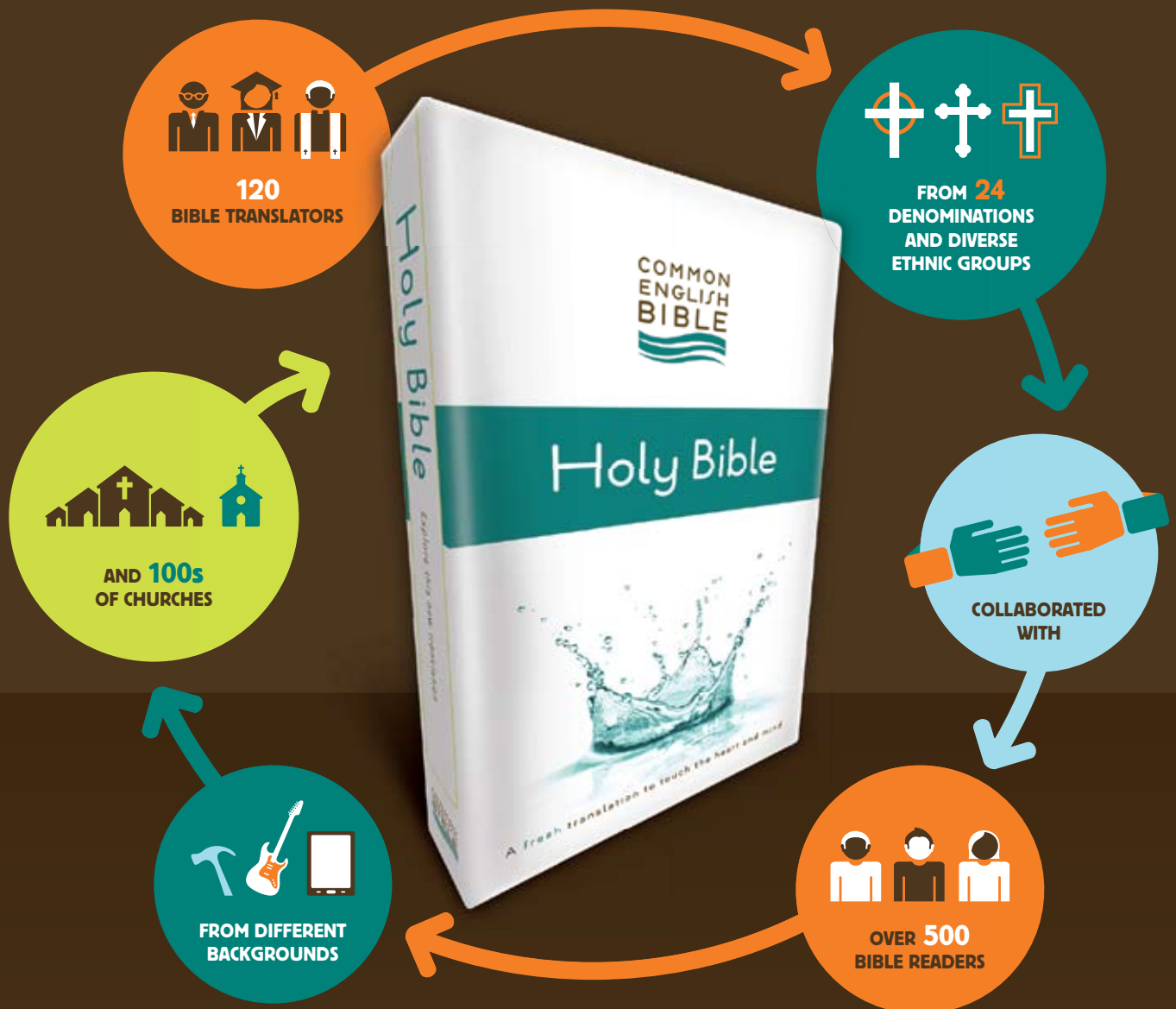
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WHY SEMINARY LEADERSHIP MATTERS

Good presidents and administrators influence not just schools, but the broader church • by BARBARA G. WHEELER

I HAVE ATTENDED the same seminary graduation every year for three decades, and every year the same thing happens: After the graduating students are in their places, the faculty enters. There is a roar of applause and acclaim from the soon-to-be graduates. It goes on for several minutes, often until the president, whose entrance has gone unnoticed, urges everyone to be quiet and sit down.

This spontaneous ovation signals a fact of seminary life: For students, the faculty is the school. The designated leaders—the president and senior administrators—are, in most cases, part of the barely noticed backdrop against which the drama of teaching, learning, and leadership development is played out. There are exceptions, of course. In seminaries that stand in liturgical traditions, the president might preside at worship on a regular basis, and the model of community life owes something to a monastic chapter with a prominent dean. And a small number of presidents are so widely known outside the school, as speakers and writers, that they have major impact on their schools' students as well as a broad public.

In research conducted by Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education, however, presidents and other senior leaders are rarely mentioned when students are interviewed about the features of seminary life that shape them and set their vocational direction. Their models for leadership are faculty members, pastors in field settings, and well-known figures in their denominational or religious circle.

If students are oblivious to their schools' administrators, does it make any difference whether these persons have gifts for leadership? Is administration merely a functional matter, reducible to management and technical skill? A recent Auburn study of seminary presidents and their teams, "Leadership that Works," suggests that seminary presidents and senior leaders can have profound

impact as leaders on the church and world, even if the students in their schools are only dimly aware of them. In fact, unless they bring leadership qualities to their roles, presidents and their associates are unlikely to succeed in creating stable, durable institutions that are adaptable and open to the future. The leadership of a president and senior team reaches well beyond the seminary walls through relationships with faculty, board members, and friends of the school.

The most effective chief executives, often in partnership with an able academic dean, teach the faculty dimensions of leadership that they may not have learned in graduate school—how to think institutionally, and how to work together as a body rather than as brilliant individual contributors to the work of the school. In order to play this role, leaders must first earn the faculty's respect by proving themselves trustworthy: They exercise good judgment, listen carefully, and uphold the faculty's legitimate prerogatives; they do not play favorites, bully, or lie. Mutual respect does not necessarily mean complete agreement.

In fact, the most skillful presidents often demonstrate what it means to think and act institutionally when their sense of what the school needs and the faculty's views come into conflict. Sometimes a compromise is reached; occasionally, presidents have to overrule the faculty. Whatever the outcome, over time the faculty may become aware of dimensions of the school's situation that had not figured in their decision-making before.

The best presidents also model, in their work with their teams and with the faculty itself, collegial styles of leadership that can infect the whole school. Here is what one faculty member told our research team about one such president and administrative team:

I think that for me a key piece of leadership is to be able



to draw the gifts from within the group that you're serving and I think all of those that are in leadership right now are quite good at that. They're good at allowing people to do things and not sort of squeezing the life out of the place but rather letting it grow and develop ... they're people that can mentor. They have their own gifts and they're happy to use them ... but they really let people do their jobs well.

In the very best situations, faculty members who work productively and well with each other and the administration may carry that collegial spirit into their teaching and provide a model for students by their patterns of shared leadership. Students take those models with them into the church and

The best presidents model collegial styles of leadership that can infect the whole school.

the world—effective leadership is passed on by example.

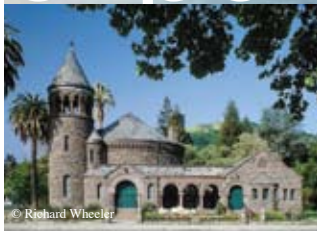
Seminary leaders also directly model leadership in the church and world. The majority may not become famous as writers or leaders of their religious movement, but they interact with their boards, graduates, and a wide network of friends for the school, thousands of persons who learn from their example as they teach the public about the seminary and the values it embodies. Here is a board member's description of components of the president's leadership:

She's the leader, but she doesn't have to do it all. She has the strength of character to be firm in the school's mission. What centers the president is her deep faith, her confidence in God's providence ... She does what she thinks is right, without fear, but with a sense of humility. She can and does say no.

Humility. Steadiness. Discipline. A commitment to doing the right thing. Faith in God's leading and help. The ablest seminary presidents have these qualities and the ability to demonstrate this model of leadership, which works not only in seminaries, but also in churches and in any organization that seeks human flourishing and the welfare of all. ■

Barbara G. Wheeler, director of the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education, was president of Auburn Seminary for 30 years. You can find a link to the "Leadership that Works" report at www.auburnseminary.org/CSTE.

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At left, promotion art for DC Comic's Green Lantern. At right, issues of one of the first comic books published in the United States.



By Gene Luen Yang

TELLING THE OLD, OLD STORY

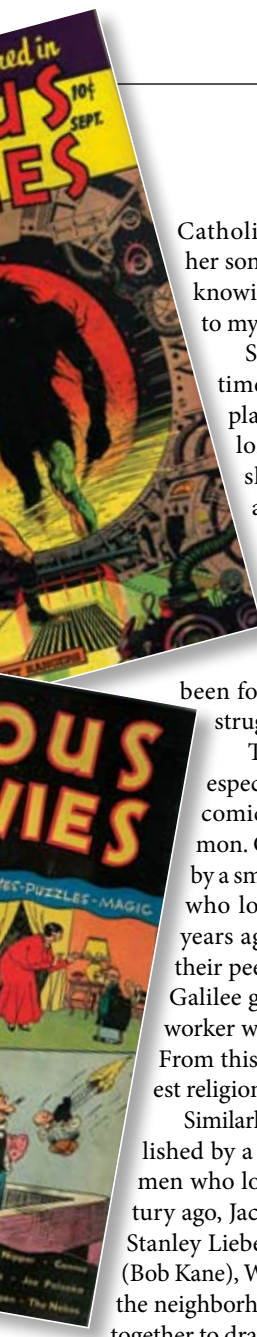
Why, despite mutual suspicions, Christianity and comics go together like paper and ink.

I REMEMBER VIVIDLY the first time I went to a comic book shop with my mom. I'd sneaked there before. But this time was different. This time I'd come without pretense, openly confessing my love of the four-color art form. I was in the fifth grade.

While I perused the back issue bins in the middle of the shop, my mother looked from one rack to the next, her face slowly solidifying into a grimace. On one cover, a half-naked green man punched a half-naked rock man in the head. On another, a woman wearing spandex tight enough to be body paint draped herself over some sort of futuristic motorcycle. Eventually, my mother's eyes fell upon the cover of a sword-and-sorcery title near the cash register. Behind a tan, sinewy barbarian stood a harem of women, all wearing thin strips of well-placed linen. We left before I could make a purchase.

On the way out, she grabbed my hand and crossed herself. Surely, a good

DC Comics poster



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Danny Duncan Collum on
Clarence Clemons' legacy

48 Vanquishing Jane Crow
Lauren F. Winner on
The Dream of Freedom

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Richard Vernon reviews
The Tree of Life

Catholic woman had to protect her son from such drivel. I sighed, knowing I would have to go back to my sneaking ways.

She didn't know it at the time, but my mother had just played out in microcosm the long, antagonistic relationship between Christianity and comics. Since its inception in 1933, the modern comic book has drawn the ire of preachers, priests, and parents. Committees and associations have been formed on both sides of the struggle.

This animosity is curious, especially since Christianity and comic books have a lot in common. Christianity was established by a small band of poor Jewish men who loved stories. Almost 2,000 years ago, Peter, James, John, and their peers in the neighborhoods of Galilee gathered around a wonder-worker who taught by telling stories. From this community grew the largest religion on earth.

Similarly, the comic book was established by a small band of poor Jewish men who loved stories. Almost a century ago, Jacob Kurtzberg (Jack Kirby), Stanley Lieber (Stan Lee), Robert Kahn (Bob Kane), Will Eisner, and their peers in the neighborhoods of New York gathered together to draw cartoons. From this community came the Fantastic Four, Iron Man, Batman, the Spirit, and a brand new entertainment industry.

This early Jewish influence permeates both Christianity and comic books to this day. The language Christians use to talk about faith is colored by Jewish concepts. We talk about the Law, sacrificial blood, and cleanliness. We refer to our savior as the Lamb of God or the Lion of Judah, recalling stories from the Torah.

Many of the most familiar comic book stories also have Jewish roots. As Moses' family sent him down the river in a reed basket to escape a besieged city, so Superman's family sends him into outer space in a metal basket to escape a besieged planet. As Samson retained his superhuman strength so

long as he avoided his fatal weakness (haircuts), so Superman retains his superhuman strength so long as he avoids his fatal weakness (Kryptonite).

The Green Lantern mythos echoes Lucifer's story. Sinestro, the greatest member of the Green Lantern Corps, becomes the Corps' greatest enemy after his pride leads him to proclaim himself the sole arbiter of right and wrong. Hal Jordan, the Green Lantern from Earth, remains good not only because of his courage, but also because of his humility.

Despite this shared heritage, however, enmity between Christianity and comics emerged early on. Most pop culture historians would peg the modern comic book's birth year to 1933, when two printing plant employees

John of Damascus suggests that our tradition of visual art grows from the very heart of the gospel.

collected Sunday strips into magazine format and published them, as a promotional giveaway, as *Funnies on Parade*. This was followed by *Famous Funnies*, the first retail comic book, in 1934. By the end of the decade, comics had become a mass medium, selling millions of issues each month.

In the beginning, Christian churches recognized the new medium's educational potential. Maxwell Gaines, one of the two men behind *Funnies on Parade* and *Famous Funnies*, founded a comics publishing house called Educational Comics, or EC Comics. Of his entire line, he was proudest of the series *Picture Stories from the Bible*, which sold particularly well to Catholic parishes and religious schools.

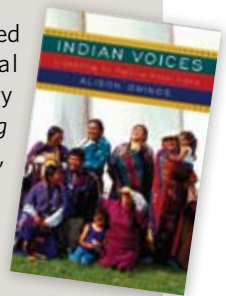
Picture Stories from the Bible proved to be the exception rather than the rule, and by 1938 enough parents voiced their concerns about their children's reading material that the American Catholic bishops created the National Organization for Decent Literature (NODL). Led mostly by Catholic priests, NODL encouraged its members to verbally

Continued on Page 47

New & Noteworthy

LIFE STORIES

Alison Owings interviewed members of 16 tribal nations for the oral history *Indian Voices: Listening to Native Americans*, capturing intimate, engaging perspectives from long-overlooked communities. An inspiring antidote to the ignorance many non-Indigenous people may unwittingly hold about contemporary Native American lives. Rutgers University Press



TWILIGHT'S TRUTHS AND CONSEQUENCES

In *The Gospel According to Twilight: Women, Sex, and God*, Perkins School of Theology professor Elaine A. Heath offers both unsparing feminist critique of gender stereotypes and violence against women in the Twilight vampire series and thoughtful analysis of its theological themes. Westminster John Knox

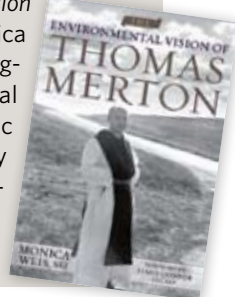


LOOKING FOR AMERICA

Facing Change: Documenting America is a nonprofit collective of photo-journalists and writers covering underreported issues and life in the U.S. They are distributing the work through an online platform and a new collaboration with the Library of Congress. facingchange.org

THE NATURE OF PRAYER

In *The Environmental Vision of Thomas Merton*, Monica Weis, SSJ explores the significance of the natural world in the great mystic and writer's spirituality and social consciousness. The University Press of Kentucky



The Vision of E Street

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN'S E Street Band of brothers is dwindling. Three years ago, organist Danny Federici died from skin cancer, at age 58. Then on June 18, 2011, saxophonist Clarence "Big Man" Clemons died, at 69, from the effects of a stroke he had suffered a week earlier. When Federici died, the band was on the road without him. He was replaced onstage by one of the players from Springsteen's *Seeger Sessions* band. And, in his official statement after Clemons' death, Springsteen clearly implied that the band would continue, saying, "With Clarence at my side, my band and I were able to tell a story far deeper than those simply contained in our music. His life, his memory, and his love will live on in that story and in our band."

But it is hard to imagine the sparks flying on E Street without Clemons. For one thing, his saxophone was sonically crucial in most of the band's best-known songs. Clemons was not, technically speaking, a great saxophone player. But that was beside the point. As Clemons himself pointed out, he was a rock-and-roll sax player, and rock and roll plays by its own set of rules. Chuck Berry was not a par-



Bruce Springsteen and Clarence Clemons perform during the halftime show of the Super Bowl in February 2009.

the E Street Band will become simply another legacy act descending into unintentional self-parody.

As Springsteen's statement acknowledged, Clemons' importance in the E Street legend was always more than simply musical. The presence of a black man front and center in America's greatest rock-and-roll band broadened the "story" Springsteen could use that band to tell. Springsteen biographer Dave Marsh has likened the on-stage myth Bruce and Clarence forged to the one Mark Twain cooked up about Huck Finn and Jim, the runaway slave. Springsteen has always understood that the rock-and-roll story is about freedom, and that the music's African-American roots are about more than just the rhythms. The African-American heritage, coming down through the spirituals and the blues to R&B, provides that liberating spiritual core. Springsteen didn't bring Clemons into the band because he was black. And Clemons didn't stay because Bruce was white. Like Huck

and Jim, they forged a partnership that transcended those considerations, and that allowed the band to project an idealized vision of an America at least temporarily redeemed from its original sin.

In the post-hip-hop (and post-Obama-election) era, when musicians and musical ideas flow freely across racial divides (witness the recent collaboration of rapper Ludacris and country hat act Jason Aldean), getting all mythic about Bruce and the Big Man can seem overblown at best, and mere tokenism at worst. Even back in the day, you often heard the joke that there were always more black people on stage at a Springsteen show than there were in the audience.

But Springsteen and his band emerged on the American scene at the very moment in the 1970s when popular music had been resegregated. "Disco sucks" was in the process of replacing "law and order" as the official code phrase for white racism. So Springsteen's choice to keep his band sonically and visibly allied with the rhythm-and-blues tradition did signify. And, in fact, the band that Springsteen took into the studio to begin recording his *Born to Run* breakthrough was half black and half white, including, as it did, keyboardist David Sancious and drummer Ernest Carter. But those two went off to form a jazz band. Clemons, born to rock, stayed, and the rest is history. ■

Springsteen has always understood that the rock-and-roll story is about freedom.

ticularly accomplished guitarist and Bob Dylan was nobody's Caruso. But they were both great in rock-and-roll terms because they had a distinctive sound and an original, if primitive, form of personal expression that connected both with a contemporary audience and deep American tradition. It's that very unschooled idiosyncrasy that would seem to make Clemons' horn irreplaceable. If a hired session player takes his solos,



Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. Find out about his new novel, *White Boy*, and more at www.dannyduncancollum.net.

Continued from Page 45

affirm their disgust of “immoral pictures” every Sunday at Mass: “I condemn indecent and immoral pictures and those which glorify crime or criminals. I promise to unite with all who protest against them ... I promise further to stay away altogether from places of amusement which show pictures that can be an occasion of sin.”

NODL also issued a monthly list of “Publications Disapproved for Youth,” which included many comics. Unfortunately, schools and churches weren’t always sure what to do with these lists. Posted lists would often be seen by young people as required, rather than forbidden, reading.

Secular institutions supported Christian disapproval of comic books. Librarians

The National Organization for Decent Literature encouraged its members to verbally affirm their disgust of “immoral pictures” every Sunday at Mass.

and teachers argued that the comics medium itself, and not just the content, impeded reading comprehension and imagination and caused eye strain. In his landmark book *Seduction of the Innocent*, psychiatrist Fredric Wertham pointed to comic books as a primary cause of juvenile delinquency.

Eventually, this anti-comic-book fervor culminated in the comic book burnings of the late 1940s. Under the guidance of their teachers, students brought their collections to schoolyards on weekends. They sang their school alma maters as the “immoral pictures” went up in flames.

Was this conflict inevitable? Were Christianity and comics destined to be enemies?

IN SCOTT MCCLOUD’S book *Understanding Comics*, he defines comics not as a genre or a type of book, but as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate



From *Super 8*

YOU CAN STILL LIVE

IT’S BEEN A fabulous few weeks for movies—at theaters and at home. There are images in the great Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Solaris*, recently released on Blu-ray and DVD, that are so beautiful they can evoke an aching longing for transcendent experience. This is entirely the point, for the film is about the search for meaning in a God-breathed universe. A man goes to space to investigate a mystery, discovers himself in the face of his loved ones, and ends in an embrace with the divine—love itself. It’s an astonishing work of art that repays multiple viewings, and serves as nothing less than an icon for worship. This summer’s *The Tree of Life*, the fifth film in 40 years from the Christian humanist artist Terrence Malick, becomes something similar, and in the process makes excellent cinematic use of Brad Pitt and Sean Penn as avatars of contemporary masculinity. It’s the most moving film I’ve seen this year.

Questions of what it means to be human are also explored in *Insignificance*, *Blow Out*, and *Kes*, all three also released on DVD for reappraisal long after they were made. *Insignificance* is a smart and amusing fantasy that brings Marilyn Monroe, Sen. Joseph McCarthy, Joe DiMaggio, and Albert Einstein together for a night of conversation, and *Blow Out* is a playful thriller about the ruination that violence brings to those individuals or nations who think it’s the only option. *Kes*, English socialist

filmmaker Ken Loach’s key movie, takes socioeconomic disenfranchisement seriously in its tragic story of a little boy aiming for hope and being crushed by the brokenness that often manifests when men haven’t learned to control their own anger. These are magnificent, important films that deserve serious attention.

As does *Super 8*, a new blockbuster that has something to say about our world. There is childlike wonder, for sure, in this tribute to *E.T.* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, but also something deeper at work. *Super 8* presents nothing less than the inversion of the myth of redemptive violence and a proposal that the best response to the real-world violence of the past decade might be a gentle recognition that no one has a monopoly on suffering. *Blow Out* and *Kes* present the challenge of a brutal world. *Insignificance* poses the deep philosophical questions that arise in its wake. And *The Tree of Life*, *Solaris*, and *Super 8* seem to be offering an answer that requires sustained meditation. A universal truth that could serve as a motto for the post-9/11 peace movement, in the words of one of *Super 8*’s characters: “Bad things happen, but you can still live.” ■

Gareth Higgins is a Sojourners contributing editor and executive director of the Wild Goose Festival. Originally from Northern Ireland, he lives in Carrboro, North Carolina.

sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response.” Using McCloud’s definition, we can trace the history of comics back to Swiss artist Rodolphe Topffer’s ink drawings in the early 1800s, which used panels and word balloons as narrative devices. Or we can trace comics back to the Japanese woodblock print books of the same era, which presented stories as mass-produced images in sequence.

McCloud himself dates comics all the way back to 1300 B.C.E., when Egyptians adorned their royal tombs with storytelling images. According to McCloud, comics are ancient, much older than Christianity.

Christians have long used images, including “juxtaposed images in deliberate sequence,” to convey the gospel. Many of Christianity’s most famous masterpieces are, by McCloud’s definition, comics. The Sistine Chapel tells the story of God and humanity, from creation to Fall to redemption, using a series of paintings meant not merely to be looked at, but read.

All this imagery stands in stark contrast to the practice of our forebears in faith, the Jews. Despite the fact that modern Jews created the modern comics industry, ancient Israelites assiduously avoided making images. Exodus 20:4 instructs, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”

Early Christians abandoned this prohibition fairly quickly. Within just a few decades of their Jewish founder’s death, first century Christians were painting images of him in the tombs of their dead. Some later Christians have argued that this was simply a corruption of the original faith.

Christian polymath John of Damascus (676-749 C.E.) understands the issue differently. He suggests that our tradition of visual art grows from the very heart of the gospel. When “the Word became flesh and made a dwelling among us” (John 1:14), God expressed the desire to make what was once invisible (the Word) visible (flesh). John of Damascus writes:

“But when the Invisible, having clothed himself in the flesh, becomes visible, then represent the likeness of him who has appeared ... Paint his birth from the Virgin,

his baptism in the Jordan, his transfiguration on Mount Tabor ... Paint everything with words and with colors, in books and on boards.”

To respond to the Incarnation—the making of the invisible visible—we must express the Incarnation visually. In other words, we must make comics.

BY THE TIME I got to high school, my mother had made peace with my love of comics. Long boxes of monthly issues cluttered my closet, and she didn’t complain as long as there was still enough room for my clothes. When I announced, shortly after turning 16, that my first trip after getting my driver’s license would be to a comic book

store, she didn’t object.

And when I began writing and drawing comic books as an adult, my mother supported me wholeheartedly, even while I was still losing money at it. Nowadays, when my mother accompanies my family and me to Mass, I watch her study the stained glass windows above us, first one and then the next, quietly pondering the messages they contain. I smile. I probably got my love of comics from her. ■

Gene Luen Yang is a cartoonist and author of 2006 National Book Award nominee American Born Chinese, Prime Baby, and most recently, Level Up. He also teaches computer science at a Catholic high school in California.

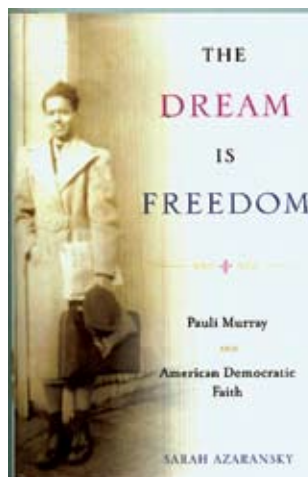
Reviewed by Lauren F. Winner

VANQUISHING JANE CROW

The Dream Is Freedom: Pauli Murray and American Democratic Faith, by Sarah Azaransky. Oxford.

CIVIL RIGHTS activist Pauli Murray (1910-1985) is known for her challenges to Jim Crow (as when she applied to the segregated University of North Carolina for graduate study in 1938), and her ordination to the priesthood in 1977 (Murray was the Episcopal Church’s first African-American female priest). She has received increased attention from both scholars and activists in recent years, but little has been said about the connections between her political commitments and her religious convictions. Sarah Azaransky ably addresses those connections in her wonderful new monograph, *The Dream Is Freedom*.

Azaransky teases out three themes in Murray’s writings. First, *identity*: Murray constantly navigated binary identities in which she did not neatly fit. She was a light-skinned African American with white and black antecedents. Her sexuality was decidedly not heteronormative; in early adulthood, she sometimes cross-dressed, and she referred to herself as having a “boy-girl” personality. She was a woman working in a civil rights movement that, by her lights, marginalized the



concerns of black women. As Azaransky shows, Murray’s vexed personal relationship to “identity” shaped her academic writing about racism. Central to Murray’s legal writings was the concept of “Jane Crow,” a term she used to name the double discrimination black women experienced.

Murray was also concerned with *history*. In *Proud Shoes* (1956), a family history that discussed both the slaves and

the slave-owners from whom Murray was descended, Murray posited her family’s story not as a strange exception to the American norm, but as paradigmatic: Like her family, the American family was multiracial, and the rape that led to the conception of her grandmother was a synecdoche for the violence that underpinned the American experiment.

Third, Azaransky identifies what she terms a *democratic eschatology* in Murray’s work. Murray continually called on America to live up to the nation’s democratic ideals. The fulfillment of America’s democratic promise lies in the future, Murray said, and each citizen must work toward the realization of genuine democracy.

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Azaransky also shows how important reconciliation was for Murray. Reconciliation was, first, a family matter. As a young adult, Murray was troubled by the pride her black grandmother took in her white forebears. But later in life, Murray “credited her grandmother’s ‘view of her own life as a symbol of

Azaransky argues that throughout her life, Murray “call[ed] on scripture and theological norms to evaluate American democracy’s failings.” She saw UNC’s refusal to admit her, for example, as not merely undemocratic, but also “un-Christian.”

Murray also spoke the idiom of democ-

church were just one instance of her using “democratic norms to critique religious practices and institutions.”

The Episcopal Church has undertaken the (lengthy) process of recognizing July 1 as a day of special remembrance for Pauli Murray. On that day, many in the Episcopal Church pray:

Set us free, heavenly Father, from every bond of prejudice and fear; that, honoring the steadfast courage of your servant Pauli Murray, we may show forth in our lives the reconciling love and true freedom of the children of God.

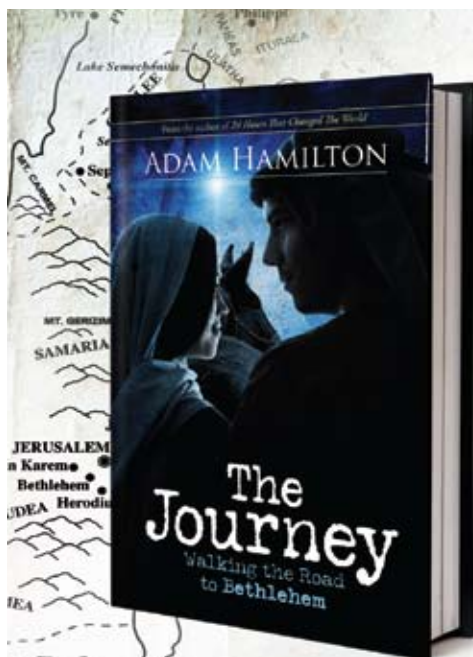
The Dream is Freedom may be read not only as an astute scholarly consideration of Murray’s religious and political commitments, but also as an informative and inspiring exegesis of the courage, reconciliation, and freedom named in the church’s prayer. ■

Lauren F. Winner is an assistant professor at Duke Divinity School.

Expecting women to fund the church while refusing to ordain them amounted to “taxation without representation.”

the possibility of the reconciliation between the races and classes, however fragmentary the symbol may have been.” This was the kind of reconciliation the nation needed, Murray believed, and her commitment manifested itself politically (as when she criticized the Black Power movement) and liturgically (as when she celebrated her first Communion at the church in which her enslaved grandmother had been baptized).

racy to criticize the church. For example, by the late 1960s, Murray had begun to work actively for the ordination of women in the Episcopal Church. When, in 1969, she received a fund-raising petition from the church, she wrote to the bishop’s office that expecting women to fund the church while refusing to ordain them amounted to “taxation without representation.” In Azaransky’s shrewd reading, Murray’s tart words to the



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 Harrisonburg, Va.

Reviewed by Richard Vernon

THE STORY OF **EVERYTHING**

The Tree of Life, directed by Terrence Malick. Fox Searchlight Pictures.

TERRENCE MALICK'S latest feature film, *The Tree of Life*, is gloriously flawed, so overreaching in its ambition and scope that it can scarcely be expected to leap the bar it set so high. It attempts to portray everything from the Big Bang to the death of our own sun, taking in single-celled organisms, dinosaurs, volcanoes, and embryology along the way. It is also an intimate portrayal of family life in '50s America and how the bereaved deal with loss. It is more than most directors dare tackle in a full career.

Since his debut, the seminal *Badlands* a lifetime ago in 1973, Malick has only made a handful of films. Renowned for lavishly shot, indisputably gorgeous movies with unusually fractured timelines, his films are either, depending on your natural prejudices, painfully slow or very carefully paced. With mere

scraps of conventional narrative, *The Tree of Life* is a demanding experience for even ardent fans. Narrative elements are interspersed with lengthy sequences of cosmic and natural phenomena. The camera moves longingly over formally analogous images: wave-molded ripples in wet sand play against weathered sedimentary layers in serpentine arroyos; towering clouds of interstellar gas reveal their kinship with drops of paint falling through water.

There are echoes of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Douglas Trumbull handled visual effects for both films) and Charles and Ray Eames' groundbreaking *Powers of Ten* (1968), which explored everything from the subcellular to the galactic via a family's lakeside picnic. The Eames' film uses the intimate and human purely as a vehicle for the dazzlingly



Brad Pitt in
The Tree of Life

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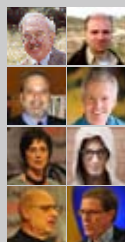


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CultureWatch

BOOKS ART MUSIC FILM

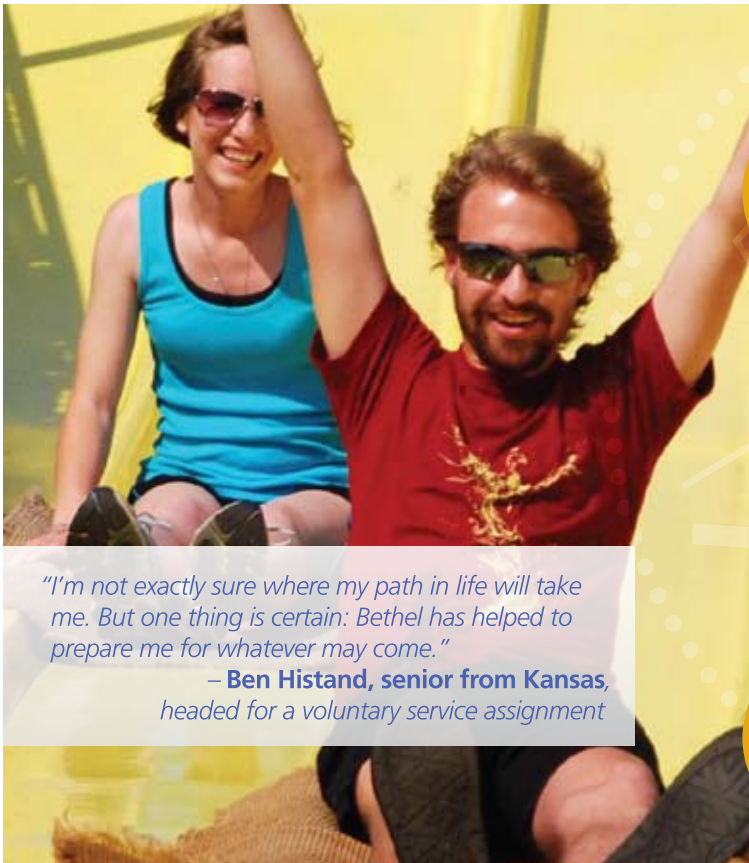
universal. What Malick does, almost miraculously, is put the cosmic at the service of the intimate.

Most of the "action" takes place in the backyard of the O'Brien family home, under the growing shadow of the tree they planted as a sapling. Brad Pitt completely inhabits the role of the tight-buttoned, ruthlessly ambitious father whose tenderness toward his three sons is consistently undermined by his frustrations and fierce desire to instill in them toughness and independence. As with all the actors, much of what is rich in Pitt's performance is communicated not through dialogue, but by dint of virtuosic direction and acting. That the father is Nature—hungry, selfish, "red in tooth and claw"—in contrast to Grace, embodied by Jessica Chastain's portrayal of the selfless mother, is superfluously pointed out in narration. Chastain's Mrs. O'Brien is the soul of the family, and her whispered prayers accompanying the cosmic imagery hold the excesses of the movie in check. In present-day scenes Sean Penn is reliably excellent as eldest son Jack O'Brien, grown-up, successful, and still broken.

The real stars, though, are Hunter McCracken, Laramie Eppler, and Tye Sheridan, who give flesh to the O'Brien sons' largely idyllic Texas boyhood. McCracken as the young Jack, who is beginning to rebel against the unjust weight of his father's hands on his shoulders, and Eppler as middle child R.L., whose trust is unfailing and whose forgiveness is unalloyed and unstinting, have a marvelous symbiosis onscreen. It is R.L.'s death at 19 that unravels the family.

It is true that some of the insights expressed in the movie's 138 minutes have been put more succinctly in greeting cards, but the scope of the work is such that some awkwardness is inevitable. I found the film glorious and inspiring. Opening with words from the book of Job, and salted with Mrs. O'Brien's pleas to her dead son, or to an unresponsive God, "Are you even there?" it is, despite all the cosmic swirling, an intensely human movie that explores the essential need for connection, and the impossibility of finding it through anything other than forgiveness. ■

Richard Vernon is a freelance writer in Brooklyn, New York.



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Not for the Faint of Heart

FOLLOWING WHERE GOD leads is not an easy task. God's ways are not only foreign to us, but often go against our sense of what is acceptable, realistic, and just. We do not become willing disciples simply by saying yes to God. It takes practice, prayer, and ongoing relationship with God and one another to shapeshift ourselves into those who "live in the manner of Christ."

We can admit openly that being faithful is hard work. Loving our neighbors as ourselves is hard work. Forgiving once—let alone seventy times—is hard work. We will fail time and time again to be who God desires us to be. But that's simply the human predicament. The good news is that God cannot seem to let us murmur and moan alone.

This month's lectionary passages highlight our very real and understandable human behavior, but also challenge us to remember who God is and to live from such remembrance. The path to salvation is a life-long journey, with fits and starts, more dependent on God's love, patience, and teaching than on our blurred understandings. But that doesn't let us off the hook as idle

recipients of God's mercy and grace. Our duty is to turn to God for instruction, to bring both our pleas and praises honestly before a God who hears us, and to love, support, and encourage one another in our feeble attempts at faithful living.



Enuma Okoro, of Durham, North Carolina, is the author of Reluctant Pilgrim and co-author of Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals.

[SEPTEMBER 4]

Life-Saving Rituals

Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 119:33-40; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20

MOST OF US, when we feel threatened, move with adrenaline and passion to defensively protect what is ours. We don't normally make time for religious rituals and attentive, communal, holy listening. This modus operandi also plays out in our collective consciousness as a nation. We instinctively resort to familiar ways of defense and protection in the face of danger, whether or not such ways have proven successful in the past.

The Exodus story offers an unusual paradigm for danger response. Here the steps are first to listen for God's instruction, to practice obedience, and to trust that God keeps God's word. Such practices preserve us from that which is not of God, including our own disordered desires and partial understandings.

It takes humility and wisdom to pray like the psalmist, to understand that—as individuals, communities, and nations—our well-being and the life-giving freedom that comes from God are always intricately bound to the well-being and freedom of other individuals, communities, and nations. When we understand this we might delight in God's commandments (Psalm

119:35) to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:8-10): to care for the bodies, minds, and spirits of our neighbors in the careful and respectful manner in which God calls us to care for ourselves (Romans 13:11-14). This is the instruction that leads to life and frees us from captivity.

There should be an urgency in being about the business of the Lord. We should be living as though we are indeed marked by the blood of the sacrificial lamb. Freedom from captivity is at hand, whether the captors are Pharaoh and his army or narcissistic cultural imaginations.

The things we "put on" (Romans 13:14) speak to what captivates us. As the Passover lamb is eaten in its entirety, we are called to take on the fullness of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. The body of Christ should not be divided literally or figuratively (Matthew 18:15-20). We are called to feed on Christ, to be freed by the blood of the lamb, and to actively and courageously turn our hearts and eyes away from what is not of God and toward the fulfillment of the law, loving our neighbor.

[SEPTEMBER 11]

Remembering

Exodus 14:19-31; Psalm 103:1-13;
Romans 14:1-12; Matthew 18:21-35

THE PSALMIST IMPLEORES listeners not to forget the benefits of the Lord. God forgives, God heals, God redeems, and God "works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed" (Psalm 103:6). We read of God's justice and vindication as God leads the Israelites through the Red Sea and drowns the "oppressors" (Exodus 14). Reading these texts in the West presents a worthy challenge. It is tempting to stand in the position of those for whom God intervenes, looking to God to hear our cries, to "redeem our lives from the pit" (Psalm 103:4) and free us from whomever we perceive as enemies.

But as Westerners whose lifestyles are delicately entangled in what Christians from other parts of the world might view as economically oppressive systems, we must tiptoe carefully in our interpretations until we find some solid footing on which to stand. This is hard. This is painful. This is almost offensive, especially on days like today, when as an American nation we remember and continue to mourn the lives that were lost 10 years ago on Sept. 11.

How do we balance our remembering of death, loss, anger, pain, and injustice with active remembering of God's way with us, all of us as God's children? God forgives. God heals. God redeems. "God does not deal with us according to our sins" (Psalm 103:10). And for this reason God says, "every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God" (Romans 14:11). We praise God because God is merciful and has released us from our debts. Now the only debt we owe God is to fulfill the law of love, to love our neighbor as ourselves, to "forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (Matthew 18:35). We might find ourselves asking—in light of our pain, grief, righteous anger, or sense of injustice—"Who is my neighbor, my sister, or my brother?" If we look to the God who became human to sacrifice his life for the love of those who considered him an enemy, then we might not struggle so much with the question but with the answer.

[SEPTEMBER 18]

What's Our "Wilderness"?

Exodus 16:2-15; Psalm 145:1-8;
Philippians 1:21-30; Matthew 20:1-16

ONE THING THESE passages refreshingly highlight is that faith is hard. Trusting God's ways is an ongoing challenge for people of faith, in the past and today. Forgiveness is hard. Patience is hard. Dependence is hard. Following Christ is not for the faint of heart.

Life with God involves seasons of wilderness wanderings. These are periods where we put one foot in front of the other and trust that God is present and will show us the way while sustaining us. It is natural to complain. It is even okay to complain. There was no indication in Exodus 16:2-15 that food was coming before the Israelites began to murmur. God does hear the cries of those in need. And God mercifully and patiently bears our complaints, knowing that we are mere mortals who cannot see as God sees, and who struggle to live "in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27). We do in fact forget the benefits of the Lord. We are afraid for our futures, often to the extent of desiring our broken pasts.

But again, our reading of scripture is so often affected by our social and political locations. If we find ourselves identifying with the wilderness narrative and crying out to God, then we must also imagine how these verses might speak to people today. What does "wilderness" look like for Christians living on Capitol Hill, in a small Midwestern town, in South Kordofan, Sudan, in Goma, eastern Congo? We have chosen to say yes to God's invitation to follow a God who doesn't play by our rules and who calls us to strive "side by side" (Philippians 1:27) in the ways of God's reign. Discomfort is natural. Fear is natural. Occasional distrust is natural. Complaining is natural. This is consistent with human character.

The challenge for us is to remember what is consistent with the character of God. The challenge is to turn our focus back to the God whom the psalmist claims does wondrous works, awesome deeds, and mighty acts (Psalm 145:1-8). Our task on the journey is

to remember that God is gracious and merciful, generous and abundantly good, even to the extent of offending our sensibilities (Matthew 20:11-16).

[SEPTEMBER 25]

Questioning Authority

Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 25:1-9;
Philippians 2:1-13; Matthew 21:23-32

"BY WHAT AUTHORITY are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" (Matthew 21:23). The question posed by the chief priests to Jesus echoes the questions the Israelites hurl at Moses. "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" (Exodus 17:3). It's a common enough question to put to religious leaders: "Who gives you the right to lead us, and why should we trust you?" And, honestly, it's a fair question, especially when these leaders suggest we follow ways that are foreign to us and may threaten our existence. Paul's letter to the church at Philippi echoes an answer when he writes, "Regard others as better than yourselves ... look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others" (2:3-4).

Questioning religious authority is not a bad thing. It can lead to necessary clarification and increased wisdom. But how can religious leaders know when we are encouraging people in the work of God? How can followers know when we are being led astray? These are good questions for communal reflection and discernment. The answers lie in the testimony of the fruit produced by leadership. What is going on within our respective communities that witness to the upside-down justice of God? Are the last placed first? Where is God's mercy being mimicked? Where is the interest of others being put first? Where are leaders and those in authority seeking, like the psalmist, to know the ways of God (Psalm 25:1-9)? ■

"Living the Word" reflections for October can be found at www.sajo.net/magazine. "Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at www.sajo.net/ptw.

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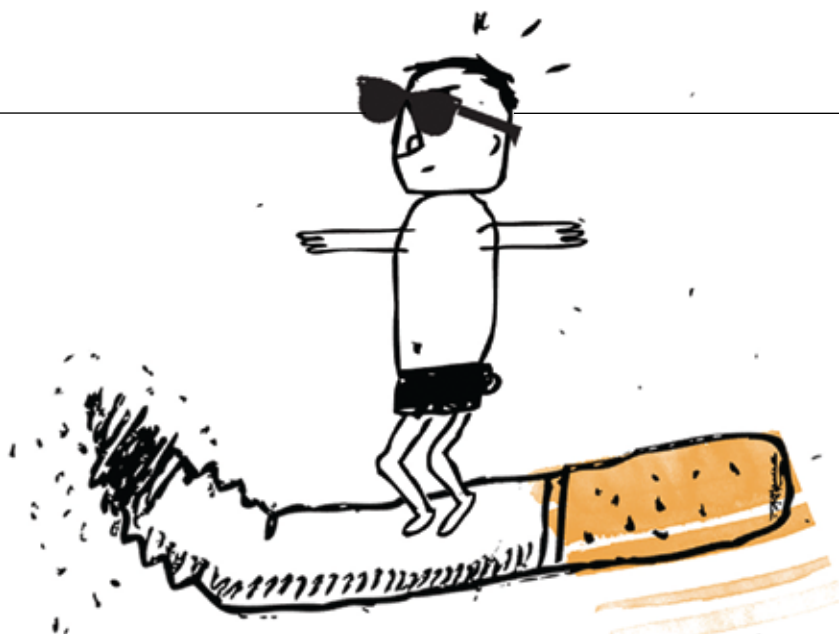
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Does That Emphysema Come in Menthol?

STARTING IN 2013, every pack of cigarettes sold in the U.S. will include graphic images portraying the physical effects of smoking, although looking really cool when you're a teenager won't be one of them. I'll probably get a first glimpse when I step outside the office for my daily dose of second-hand smoke, thoughtfully provided by the one remaining addict who has so far resisted my intense campaign against the practice.

There used to be a group of smokers at the front entrance, working

I wonder if his attitude will change when he buys his first pack of cigarettes with the picture of a dead man on a morgue table, his bare chest crudely stitched up from neck to waist. He was presumably the victim of a lifetime of smoking, not to mention a hasty autopsy. (Either that, or somewhere there's a Home Depot manager trying to forget a chain-saw demonstration that could have gone better.)

The new labels will include close-up images of rotting teeth, unsightly cancer lesions, and decayed inter-

In fact, hideous pictures of dead people and body parts will more likely create a cool new collectibles market, kind of like baseball cards but without the boring statistics on the back.

"Dude, I'll give you my Old Guy in an Oxygen Mask for your Dead Guy with Stitches."

"No way, dude, unless you throw in Mouth with Horrible Teeth. I'm using it as my new profile picture on Facebook."

Let's be honest here; there are better images to show teenagers the consequences of smoking. Like maybe a picture of a father flushing a young driver's car keys down the toilet. Or a mom dropping her teen's cell phone into a food processor. Or two stern-faced parents texting "You're grounded."

If that doesn't work, maybe a message in large print that declares that parents will accompany their teenagers to every social event until after college. "It's okay," the small print underneath might add, "we can show your friends how to do 'The Electric Slide.' They'll think you're the coolest kid in school!"

Parents moving to the beat on the dance floor. Now that's a scary image. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

Those people should have taken better care of themselves.

collaboratively to induct nonsmokers into their demographic of future emphysema sufferers. But after months of merciless debasement from me—including once spraying air freshener into their midst—they changed their self-destructive habits and are now living happy, smoke-free lives. Or they just moved around the corner. All but the one holdout, a stone-faced man of the muscular persuasion who, between mumbling to himself in a deep baritone and glancing around threateningly, seems more likely to crush me like a Marlboro hard pack than discuss his impact on the nation's health-care system.

nal organs, as well as pictures of a woman dying of cancer, a guy smoking through a hole in his neck, and Michele Bachmann taking the oath of office. Okay, I made up the last one, although that would definitely make me stop smoking. And start drinking.

Unfortunately, the targets of these labels are mainly teenagers, who probably see worse images playing "Zombies Must Die" or some other gruesome game on their Nintendos when they're supposed to be doing homework. (Parent, shouting up the stairs: "That doesn't sound like geometry up there!" Kid: "It's biology. I'm ... dissecting.")

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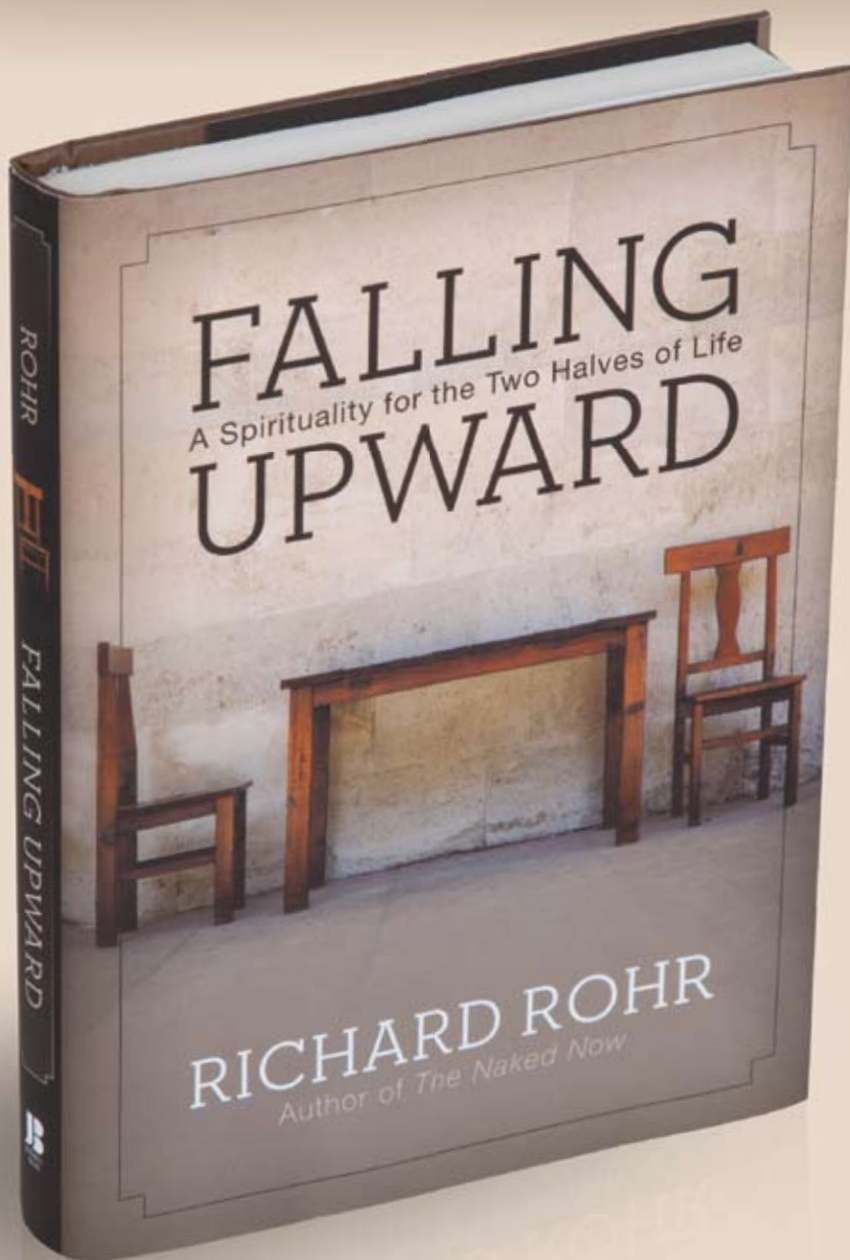
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